

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. Amen.

Forty years. That is how long I led these people. Forty years. We came out of Egypt together. We fought battles together. We buried our family members together. Forty years. And in all that time we had but one yearning; but one wish: to make it to the Promised Land. The time was drawing near. It was coming so close we could taste the milk and honey the LORD had foretold. The people were anxious, and so was I.

We were all ready to finally stop wandering from place to place. Ready to be done with eating manna and quail. We were ready to see the fulfillment of the LORD's great promise, the one he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That we would finally be able to go and claim our new and rightful homeland. For forty years this thought had never left my mind, because I, Moses, had been called by the LORD for this very reason. To lead the people out of slavery and into Canaan. But there was just one problem. I wasn't going to get to finish the job.

There was an incident back at Meribah Kadesh. It was in the middle of the desert and there was no water to drink. The people became restless, and soon, got angry. 'If only we had died before! Then we wouldn't have to suffer now! If only we had stayed in Egypt where we had water and food! Why did you do this to us?' Things looked grim. But, the LORD had a plan, as he always does. He told Aaron and I to go to a particular rock and speak to it in front of all the people. From this rock the LORD would bring forth water, enough for everyone to drink. Well, I spoke alright, but not to the rock. I spoke to the people instead. My words were angry and spiteful, calling them rebels. And then with enmity in my heart I hit the rock with my staff. Water did come gushing out, but so had my rage. I had disobeyed the LORD's command. I didn't trust in Him to do as He had promised. I didn't honor him and so I defamed His name before the people. I had sinned. So, the LORD told me, **'...you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'**

Perhaps you think that the LORD was being too harsh with me for this one infraction. I, too, thought that way for a while. I wanted to blame those annoying people. Do you have any idea how many times they had done this to me? Over and over they complained to me. Time after time they grumbled against me. One time they even tried to pull off a coup, wanting to get rid of me altogether. And let's not forget how they refused to go into Canaan when they had the chance the first time. Can you understand why I lost my temper? I can't believe I didn't do it sooner! But I was supposed to lead the people. I was supposed to show them how to treat the LORD their God. I was supposed to set an example of how they should treat each other. Instead, I let my emotions get the best of me. How could I lead the people into the Promised Land if this was the kind of leadership I would provide? I was no longer fit for the task.

I understood what the LORD was doing. But this is also what was making me nervous. I knew how these people could be. I worried over what they might do if there wasn't someone there to lead them. Would they follow after other gods? Would they get discouraged when times were tough? Would they give up when enemies attacked? Would they make it home if they didn't have a shepherd? So, I pleaded with God, **'May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.'**

Maybe you think I'm a bit crazy for caring so much about these people after all they had done to me. I must admit I thought about leaving them to their own devices. But then I would remember how the LORD had treated me. Do you remember the man I was before I was called? I had murdered another man in cold blood. And instead of sticking around to face the consequences, I ran away. I abandoned my family and deserted my people. God could have left me to my own devices, let me live out my days without Him. But he didn't. He had compassion on me. In his mercy, he came to me. Though I did not deserve it, He brought me back to himself.

I remembered, as well, how the LORD treated His people. All those times of rebellion; all those moments of grumbling and complaining? Those weren't really against me, but against the Lord of heaven and earth. Yet, did he let these people go their own way? Did he, in his anger, wipe them off the face of the earth? No. He had compassion on them. He showed them mercy. He forgave their wickedness and sin. He always did what was best for them, even providing miracle after miracle so that they would not be lost. After witnessing the great compassion of the LORD, how could I be any different?

I could not stop caring for these people, my people. And thankfully, neither could the LORD. And so, immediately there came an answer to my prayer. The LORD told me, **'Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him...commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him.'** All my worries and concerns were already known by the LORD. And wouldn't you know it, he had been planning for this the whole time. For years now Joshua had been my right-hand man. For decades he had been by my side. The LORD had been preparing him to be a new shepherd and so filled him with the Spirit. The LORD had been ready to meet the needs of his people, so that they would not be like sheep without a shepherd. In his great compassion, the LORD gave them what they needed to get to the Promised Land.

The same is true for you, here today. No, you aren't living in the desert somewhere. You aren't wandering around the wilderness. But you have needs, the same as anyone else. You need someone to lead you, someone to guide you, someone to protect you, someone to make sure that you will make it home to the Promised Land. No, I'm not talking about what you call the land of Israel and Palestine. I'm talking about your true home, a land flowing with goodness and holiness, a land where all is at rest. I'm talking about heaven. And the LORD has given you what you need to get there.

Because make no mistake about it, you couldn't get there on your own. That land is one of pristine perfection. There is no wickedness or evil around. And none will ever be allowed. Which makes it impossible for imperfect people like you and me to get in on our own. Have you ever spoken an insulting word in anger against someone else? If so you have dishonored the name of the LORD. Have you ever grumbled and complained even though you have all that you need for life and more? If so, you have offended the glory of the one who works out all things for your good. Clearly you and I are not worthy to enter into Paradise. We need help; we need compassion; if we are ever going to have heaven as our home.

But the LORD, as always, had a plan. In his great compassion, he sent a shepherd to lead His people home. This was no earthly shepherd. No, this was God's own Son who came down from heaven. He was to be THE Good Shepherd providing for all our needs. We needed holiness, so He lived all his days without grumbling or complaining, without ever speaking an unkind word. And through his perfect life and counted as righteous. We also needed our sins to be taken away. So, this shepherd laid down his life for us, his sheep. He took to himself all evil, wickedness and sin on the cross. By his wounds and his death, we are healed. And if we were ever to make it up to heaven someday, we needed to somehow come back from death. So, Jesus, with his divine power, came back from the grave to live forever. Through this miracle we have the ultimate guarantee that we too will live again. Because of this great Shepherd, we have all that we need to make it to the eternal Promised Land.

Truth be told, this is what I truly wanted for the people of Israel. It wasn't just about them making it to the land of Canaan. It was about them making it to the land of eternal rest. That's why I prayed for a leader, for a shepherd to replace me. So that the people would not be lost to sin forever. So that they would not be taken by the fires of hell. I thanked the LORD for Joshua, not just because he would lead them in battle and settle their disputes. But rather, that he would lead the people to the LORD their God and have His compassion forevermore.

You heard Jesus tell you before to ask the LORD to send out workers into the harvest fields. And to that I say, 'Amen.' Because there will always be a need for more leaders, always be a need for more shepherds, always be a need for more to carry on the work. Pray for more men to become shepherds of God's flock. Pray for more women to teach little lambs about their Shepherd. Pray for more workers to bring in the harvest of souls that are out there. Pray for all this and more and trust that our LORD God will always provide what you need. Amen.