I love to read and a few weeks ago I ran across a word quiz from a non-Christian publication that – at first – angered me. I thought they were making fun of Christianity. But once I read the answer to the quiz I realized not only were they NOT doing that, but in fact someone had created a very clever and Godly puzzle. So I’m going to share this puzzle with you this morning and see if you can figure it out:

What is it that is greater than God?
More evil than Satan?
Rich people DON’T have it?
Poor people DO have it?
And if you eat it… you will die?

Answer: NOTHING

Nothing is greater than God
Nothing is more evil than Satan
Rich people don’t have nothing
Poor people do
And if you eat nothing… you’ll die

The puzzle makes sense once you know the answer.
But until you know the answer, it is really confusing.
AND that’s the case with our story this morning.

Moses is taken to the top of Mt. Nebo and told by God: “take a look before you die, because you’re not going to get into the Promised Land. This is all you get to see.

Really? Why?
Deuteronomy 32:51 explains:
“This is because both of you (Moses and Aaron) broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin and because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites.”
What was this all about?
Well, let’s go back and read the story.
It only shows up in Numbers 20:1-12

“In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses and said, ‘If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD’s community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!’

Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. The LORD said to Moses,
‘Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. SPEAK to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.’

So Moses took the staff from the LORD’s presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, ‘Listen, you rebels, must WE bring you water out of this rock?’ Then Moses raised his arm and STRUCK THE ROCK twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.’

What had Moses done wrong?
1st – he got angry with the mob of protestors.
2nd – he claimed HE was getting water from the rock... when it was actually God.
And 3rd he’d disobeyed God. God said speak to the rock... Moses struck it with the staff.

For that, Moses was refused entry into the Promised Land and died in the wilderness.
That’s it!
That’s the whole story.
And I’ve seen whole sermons dedicated to explaining why Moses didn’t
deserve to get into the Promised Land.
• He got mad
• He claimed credit
• And he disobeyed God

But something about this story just doesn’t make sense.
It’s like a puzzle with a couple of pieces missing.

Go with me here for a minute:
Moses has been leading the people of Israel in the desert for 40 years, and
for most of that 40 years it’s been no picnic. These people have been
extremely difficult.
▪ They’ve complained, and bickered and they’ve been rebellious.
▪ They’ve insulted Moses.
▪ They’ve rejected God’s will.
▪ And frankly, they’ve basically been a real pain to work with.

But in spite of that, for most of that 40 years Moses has been the ideal
leader. He seems to actually care for these folks.
▪ He’s prayed for them.
▪ He’s reasoned with them.
▪ And he’s interceded with God for them. At one point God got so angry with
the Israelites that God says “stand back and let me destroy these wicked
people. Then we’ll start over again with just you.” But Moses refuses and
intercedes for God to spare them.

On top of that, Moses seems to have been one of the few men in Scripture
that God personally praises. We’re told in Numbers 12:3 (ESV) “… Moses
was VERY MEEK, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.”

It’s like God was saying that Moses shined so brightly the rest of the world
seemed tarnished.
That’s high praise from God.
So here we have Moses - just months away from crossing the Jordan River and he slips up ONE TIME. He loses his temper ONE TIME. And he’s denied access to the Promised Land.

ILLUS: I was sitting in Jim’s Sunday School Class a couple weeks ago and they were studying this very passage of Scripture. And everyone seemed to be in agreement:
This doesn’t seem fair!
Doesn’t seem right!
This shouldn’t happen to someone like Moses!

And if this were the “last chapter” of the story, they’d be right. It’s not fair. But this isn’t the last chapter. There’s more to the story than appears at first glance.

Do you remember my telling you last week that God loves to paint pictures in Scripture? All through the Old Testament God repeatedly gives us images that tell us about Jesus and what He’d be like... and what He’d do.

ILLUS: If you look through the Law you’ll see pictures of Jesus in the sacrifices. If you examine the instructions on how they were to construct the Tabernacle, you’ll find images of Jesus show up in all the materials and measurements of every corner of that tent. And in the Old Testament stories of the heroes and heroines you’ll not just see true stories of those people, but you’ll see how God weaves that truth in such a way that their very lives and stories point to Christ.

For example, last week we talked about Abraham and ONLY SON Isaac. And how Abraham offering his only begotten son Isaac as a sacrifice was a portrait of what God was going to do through Jesus.

And here – with Moses – God’s doing it again.

Let’s look at this thru God’s eyes.
The people of Israel have been in the wilderness for 40 long years and now they are about to be led into the Promised Land. Moses won’t get to lead them there, however. Who does lead them into the Promised Land? (JOSHUA) That’s right – Joshua. Keep that in your mind and we’ll get back to that.

For the Christian - crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land - has always been symbolic for crossing over into Heaven when we die. The chilly waters of the Jordan = Death. The glory of the Promised Land = Heaven. (See Footnote #1)

Many of the old hymns reflected that truth. For example, there’s an old hymn written back in the 1700s entitled “I Am Bound For The Promised Land. If you know it, sing it with me:

1. “On Jordan's stormy banks I stand and cast a wishful eye
   To Canaan's fair and happy land, where my possessions lie.

   (Chorus) I am bound for the promised land, I am bound for the promised land
   O who will come and go with me - I am bound for the promised land.

2. Soon will the Lord - my soul prepare - for joys beyond the skies,
   Where never-ceasing pleasures roll, and praises never die.”

The Promised Land was (and is) seen as Heaven. It’s a place where my true possessions are laid up for me. A place of pleasure and joy. But now, how do we get INTO heaven? Do we get in by doing good works? Do we get in by obeying the commandments of the OT law?

NO, we get in by following Jesus.

Now God was very careful in how he painted this picture for us. What is Moses FAMOUS for? (LAW) In fact it’s often called the “Law Of Moses”.
So Moses represents the Old Testament Law. Hold that in your mind for a moment.

Moses doesn’t get to lead Israel into the Promised Land (symbolic for heaven) But who does get to lead God’s people across the Jordan? (JOSHUA)

Do you know what the name “Joshua” means? (SAVIOR) Do you know what the name “Jesus” means? (SAVIOR) It’s the same name. Joshua is the Hebrew way of spelling “Jesus.” So Joshua (Savior) was the Old Testament image of Jesus.

So, think about this: God would not let Moses – the image of the LAW – lead His people into the Promised Land, that job fell to Joshua, the Old Testament picture of Jesus.

So... you have the Law... and you have Jesus The LAW (Moses) could not lead His people into His Promised Land. Only JESUS (the Savior) could do that.

God’s point was this: the Law could never bring us into His presence. The Law could not bring into Heaven/ the Promised Land.

Paul wrote in Romans 3:20 “no-one will be declared righteous in (God’s) sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”

ILLUS: The purpose of the law was to be like a mirror. Its purpose was to help us realize that something was wrong in our lives. Let’s say you’ve been out in the garden and gotten your face dirty. You go into the bathroom and look into the mirror and you see the dirt. Can the mirror cleanse their face of the dirt? Of course not... the mirror only makes us conscious of dirt.

In the same way you cannot use the Law to cleanse your heart and make yourself acceptable to God. The Law can’t do that.
That’s what Jesus is for.

Galatians 2:16 says “a man is NOT JUSTIFIED by observing the law, but by FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and NOT BY OBSERVING THE LAW, because by observing the law no-one will be justified.”

No matter how good you’ve been, when you stand before God at the judgment, you can’t point to YOUR righteousness and expect God to be impressed. Your righteousness won’t get you into heaven. Jesus’ Righteousness will!

Now let’s review:
Why couldn’t Moses get into the Promised Land? (HE SINNED)
How many sins did Moses commit?
One!

Did you realize that it only takes ONE sin to keep you out of heaven? That’s what God was teaching us here with Moses... it only takes ONE sin.

James 2:10 says “whoever keeps the whole law and yet STUMBLES AT JUST ONE POINT is GUILTY OF BREAKING ALL OF IT.”

So, we have Moses – one of the greatest men who ever lived. A man greatly respected by God. A man who dealt gently with one of the most quarrelsome difficult people on earth. A man who KNEW the Law... and had his ducks all in a row. This man commits ONE SIN... and he doesn’t get into the Promised Land.

How many sins have you committed in your life? Do you think maybe I’ve committed several sins in my life? (pause) You don’t have to be so eager to agree with me on that [smile]

If Moses couldn’t get into the Promised Land because he committed one sin... what makes you think you (OR I) can get into heaven committing
more than that? That's it. Game over. We may as well go home.

(PAUSE)

But one last thought:
Did Moses EVER get into the Promised Land?
(This was met with puzzled looks).
Well, let’s look at Matthew 17:1-3:

“After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.
Just then there appeared before them MOSES and Elijah, talking with Jesus.”
So did Moses get into the Promised Land.
Yes he did!
But how did he get there?
Only thru Jesus.
Moses didn’t make it because he was a great man, or a man made righteous by the Law.
The only way he got in was because Jesus brought him.

But there was more:
“Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for MOSES and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. LISTEN TO HIM!’
When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. ‘Get up,’ he said. ‘Don’t be afraid.’ When they looked up, THEY SAW NO-ONE EXCEPT JESUS.” Matthew 17:4-8

Moses was there, and Elijah was there.
These were the two greatest men of the Old Testament.
Moses was the representative of the Law and Elijah the greatest of the prophets.
And Peter was amazed and sought to honor all of them.
But then a cloud came and a voice said:  
“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. LISTEN TO HIM!”

The disciples fell to their knees and when they looked up... what did they see?  
Only Jesus.  
Moses and Elijah had disappeared in the mist because God was making a point:  
LOOK AT AND LISTEN TO Jesus.  
Moses and his Law won’t get you into heaven.  
Elijah and the power of miracles won’t get you into heaven.  
We need to LOOK AT and LISTEN TO no one except Jesus - because HE is our only hope of salvation.

Peter apparently learned his lesson well.  
In Acts 4:12 Peter declares:  
“Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

So was it unfair for God not to let Moses lead the Israelites into the Promised Land?  
Of course not!  
God was honoring him by delaying his arrival.  
God had given him a gift that made him greater than he ever would have been had he only been known as the giver of the Old Testament Law. That gift? To be allowed to make his life all about pointing to Jesus.

And that’s the same gift you and I are offered.  
Moses didn’t deserve to get into the Promised Land. He sinned. Only Jesus could bring him there. And so his hope laid only in Jesus. And that was his testimony.  
And that’s our testimony as well.  
When people realize we’re not Christians because we deserve Jesus, but because we need Him we have been given the gift of pointing to Christ with our own lives and words.

INVITATION
Footnote #1: While researching for this sermon on the internet I found many "commentators" opposed the idea that the “Promised Land” symbolized heaven. They almost unanimously agreed that the Promised Land was supposed to represent our present status as Christians as opposed to a future destination of heaven. The Scriptures never explicitly tie the term "Promised Land" to heaven (or to our present Christian life). However, in Hebrews 4:1-11 God talks about "entering His rest". Verse 8 says: "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day." The implication is that the Promised Land was A "rest" but the TRUE "rest" was yet to come. If that's true then verse 11 implies that the true "rest" or "Promised Land" is our future in heaven rather than our present existence in Christ: "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience." If the "rest" or "Promised Land" was already attained, it would be illogical to urge Christians to "make every effort to enter that rest."

Footnote #2: There was a unique observation made by a preacher named Don Fortner (http://www.donfortner.com/sermon_notes/05_deuteronomy/deu%2034v01-09%20Lessons%20from%20Mt%20Pisgah%2038.htm) "As God buried Moses in Mt. Nebo and all hell cannot dig up his body, so Christ nailed the law to his cross, taking it out of the way forever, and though Satan constantly seeks to raise it up, Michael the Archangel (our blessed Lord Jesus) stands by his finished work and pours out his grace and righteousness in the full forgiveness of sin upon his chosen (Jude 9; Zechariah 3:1-9). (1 Corinthians 1:30-31) 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.'"