

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

## The Characters of Faith (Moses – Part 5a) Hebrews 11:23-29

*23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.*

It is certainly not as though I come to you this morning wishing to introduce a new subject. As we come to Hebrews 11:23-29 we are confronted yet again with the topic of faith. Hebrews 11 is the faith chapter. It contains not only the characters of faith, that is names and descriptions of the faithful themselves, but it also, and most importantly, presents us with the very characteristics of faith. More than any other chapter of the Bible, Hebrews 11 allows us a look at the very nature, make-up and composition of faith. This chapter is not meant to exalt the individuals mentioned, but is meant to clearly expose the disposition of faith. The intention of Hebrews 11 is to answer the question, "what is faith?" And while we may be impressed with some of the names mentioned in our text, ultimately the only name we ought to be concerned about as we read through the passages of this chapter is - - - our own. For it is only trivial to answer the question, "who are the faithful?" with the names mentioned in Hebrews 11. For the concern of the text is to have you answer the question, "Am I faithful like this?" "Do I possess the same faith as those mentioned in this text?" "Does my faith look like their faith?"

It could be easy to become excessively hard on yourself as you consider the faith expressed by these in this chapter. While I think it right and good to examine your faith, remember that we are to examine our faith in light of not just one of these persons, but all of these persons. For in any one of these individuals alone, it is not generally difficult to find areas of their lives where they failed in their faithfulness. But taken as a whole, we see a fullness of faith that we can strive for. Now, I don't know if Hebrews 11 express the absolute fullness of the character of faith or not, but it contains enough for us to learn and then prayerfully assimilate into our own lives that we might live for and to the glory of God.

In our text this morning we are presented with the life of one of Israel's greatest individuals. After showing the readers the characteristics of faith in the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, the author of Hebrews draws our attention to Moses or more specifically the life of Moses, for as we will come to see in our text, we will not be limited to only the nature of the faith of Moses, but will see as well the faith of those who were associated with Moses. And just as we have learned from our previous studies, we are to see that the faith associated with Moses is to be the faith associated with all who would be called faithful. And just what are the characteristics of the faith associated with Moses that are to be

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associated with all who are called faithful? I offer to you this morning five such characteristics of faith from Hebrews 11:23-29 --

- I. Faith Acts (11:23)
- II. Faith Chooses (11:24-26)
- III. Faith Endures (11:27)
- IV. Faith Looks (11:28)
- V. Faith Obeys (11:29)

This morning we will flesh out the first of these descriptions of faith – namely that faith acts. In so doing may we wisely discern either the presence or lack thereof of an active faith in our lives, pleading with our gracious Lord for an increase to our faith, that it might look even as this.

## **I. Faith Acts (11:23)**

*23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid [aorist passive] of the king's edict.*

Looking now at verse 23, we begin by noting that Faith Acts [Read Text]. Contrary to what many often purport and demonstrate by their lives, faith is not passive. Rather genuine faith is described in terms of being a very active and dynamic influence upon one's life. Faith actively regards certain things about God and about this world to be true. Faith actively depends upon the revelation of God in His Word as the only reliable source for how to live for God. Faith actively trusts in the person, provisions and promises of God and then actively, purposely, and determinedly pursues to live accordingly.

Faith always does something. Genuine biblical faith never stands still but wants to know more of God and do more for God; not in some vain attempt to win God over or prove its own worth, but rather simply to demonstrate that it has taken root in the heart to whom it was given. Let us understand that genuine, biblical, saving faith always affects the whole of a person. As J.C. Ryle noted in his book "Holiness" – "A faith that does not influence a man's practice is not worthy of the name." And again I quote from Ryle when he wrote, "A man will go just so far as he believes." Faith acts. Faith does something. Faith is dynamic. And this is just what we are to see in Hebrews 11:23, a faith that acts. And there are two active aspects of faith to note.

### **1. Faith actively responds -**

A careful examination of this verse shows us that this is not a description of the faith of Moses, but rather one of his parents, Amram and Jochobed. Like our other verses, the mention of Moses would have drawn the original reader's mind right back to Exodus 1-2 and the story of the birth and providential care of Moses. Let me give you some of the familiar background.

At the start of the book of Exodus, the children of Israel had, over some time, grown numerous and prospered. So much so that a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph arose and became concerned that the Israelites might overthrow his rule. What did he do? He enslaved the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly on his own building projects. But even with this

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harsh treatment, the Israelites continued to thrive and multiply. Then Pharaoh issued a decree, and edict (so says our text) – a kingly command – the law of the land. The Hebrew midwives were to put to death every son that was born. Of course they would not do it and so the law called for the parents to cast their newborn sons into the river Nile. Evidently, and sadly, there were some who did just that.

But the parents of Moses were not about to let the local government tell them how they ought to raise (or not raise) their child. Rather, they trusted in the LORD and our text seems to indicate that there was something about Moses that was a clear expression of the LORD's call to keep him alive. Hebrews 11:23 says that his parent's defied the law of Pharaoh "**because they saw he was a beautiful child.**" Now this seems to be a rather ambiguous statement. There are very few parents who do not see their babies as beautiful. This same word translated "**beautiful**" here is translated as "**lovely**" with reference to Moses in Acts 7:20. It seems best to understand this as some kind of divine mark (not necessarily physical) on the baby Moses. It is not so much that the baby Moses was beautiful or lovely in form to his parents, but rather beautiful or favored to and by God. Some old Jewish commentators suggest that this refers to a vision that Amram, his father, had that predicted God's intentions for Moses. John Calvin noted,

*"The parents of Moses were not induced by his beauty as to be touched with pity and save him as men are commonly affected, but there was some sort of mark of excellence to come, engraved on the boy which gave promise of something out of the ordinary for him."*

Somehow, the parents of Moses saw God's divine hand upon both them and him and so, "**when he was born, [Moses] was hidden for three months...**" These acted, so says our text, "**by faith**". They did not hide Moses because of the fear of Pharaoh, which we will look at in a moment, but rather out of faith to God. We see that their faith was an active response to the revelation of God – a manifestation of their trust in the providence and revelation of God. They were prompted "**by faith**" to act in a manner that was consistent with the purpose of God. But what did this faith look like? If God had indeed granted Amram and Jochobed grace to defy the command of Pharaoh, did they then proceed to flaunt their faith?

If you read Exodus 2, you will not find Amram and Jochobed overtly walking about with baby Moses saying, "Here's our baby – we defy Pharaoh!" Their faith in God, while prompting them to act, did not cause them to claim before all that because they trust in God there was no need to hide Moses. Rather than this the story indicates that they took every precaution to hide his birth, squelch his cries and keep him alive, even up to the point to putting him into a basket to float rather than cast him into the river.

And it is this action (as opposed to passive inaction) – it is this active response that Hebrews 11:23 calls "faith." But how does "hiding a baby" constitute faith in this instance? Beloved, contrary to what is often propped up as faith, faith does not presume upon God, but takes every appropriate action, all the while trusting God to bring forth the fullness of His purposes. Faith acts. And while the parents of Moses believed God, however He revealed Himself to them, they did not take a passive course of action, they were active in their protection of Moses and this is what our text calls faith.

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How does this relate to us today? The sad reality is that far too many see faith as nothing more than a passive trusting in the LORD, a non-active waiting – waiting for God to act, for God to do something, for God to accomplish something. Beloved, faith is in us and is to cause us to act, to do, to wait on the Lord not simply in the sense of sitting around until something happens, but in the sense of waiting on or actively serving the Lord according to His revealed Word. A faith that does not act and does not do is not really faith at all, it is, at best either *presumption* upon the LORD or even *laziness*. Presuming upon God so that you justify doing nothing is not an active response to God but is active rebellion. Faith involves putting your feet to the pavement. For example, how many of us would love to see a spiritual awakening in Northwest Arkansas? How many of us would love to see not only this church, but all solidly biblical churches filled to overflowing with new converts? How would we delight to see people growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Do we trust that the LORD desires people to be saved? We dare not say no. But such a trust implies a faith of action – not inaction as God has revealed in His Word that the faith of salvation comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. If we have faith that God saves, then we will have a faith that prays for awakening, a faith that sacrifices time and energy for it, a faith that speaks to others about Christ, and a faith that encourages others to come to church or bible study, a faith that calls people to repentance and to the LORD.

Do we know if God has willed that all of Rogers would repent and be saved? No, we don't know if He has willed it. But we do know that He does not desire that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Just as Amram and Jochobed may have been uncertain as to exactly what the LORD had in store for Moses but faithfully and actively engaged in the plans of the LORD, so too must we, who are uncertain as to who the LORD will save, know that the LORD has called us to faithfully and actively engage in the plan to save by communicating the gospel, showing goodwill to all men, and loving the brethren.

But let me come back then to this passive picture of faith, this attitude that says that faith is nothing more than sitting around, keeping quiet and doing nothing until the LORD returns. Beloved, this is not faith at all. Consider areas of your own life where you might be given over to a passive, lazy faith, constantly waiting for God or for others to act?

Let's consider this in light of the growing needs in our church here. We have children's ministries that need to be coordinated and manned. We have at current a need for home and foreign mission' projects to be evaluated and established. We have many singles in our church that need and desire friendship and fellowship outside of church. Has not God called individuals to teach and admonish one another? Has not God called us, individually and as a church to "go and make disciples"? Has not God called us individually to fellowship with Him and with His people? And yet often, some of us, not all, but some of us and perhaps all of us at some time or another, might be guilty of not responding to the revelation of God personally and individually, waiting for someone else to help in areas of ministry in the church, waiting for someone else to call to encourage and initiate fellowship, waiting on others to serve the church or the congregation in some fashion. Such is a passive faith and often a passive faith does nothing more than criticize others for what is not being done; what is not being done in the church or what is not being done for them rather than looking upon the church as the "beloved" of God, as beautiful and lovely to God and then responding "by faith" to be active in seeing that loveliness manifested all the more by means of actively responding to the commands, the

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edicts of God. Faith acts and faith actively responds by doing things consistent with the Word of God.

## 2. Faith Actively Resists

But there is a second manifestation of this faith that acts in our text. Not only did faith respond as seen in the lives of Amram and Jochobed, but it also actively resists the negative influences and intentions of the world. We read at the end of Hebrews 11:23, **“and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”** By faith, Amram and Jochobed actively resisted the temptation to fear Pharaoh and his command rather fearing and trusting in the power of God being greater than the power of Pharaoh.

Beloved, if there is any threat to actively responding to the LORD by faith, it is living in fear; living in the fear of man. The fear of man paralyzes godly activity. If Amram and Jochobed **“were not afraid (a word that means “exceedingly in fear”) of the king’s edict”** – if they were not in fear of what the most powerful man among them could do to them, it stands to reason that they feared no man. And just what was it they had to fear? This is intense.

First, they could have feared that by saving their son, they were risking their own lives, which they were. While this would have demonstrated a great love for their son, it was potentially exposing them to the wrath of Pharaoh, a wrath I am sure would have been great – but they did not fear this. A second fear they might have faced was that if they had killed their own son in order to save their own lives, they would have been guilty of murder and would fear standing before God in judgment.

But rather than being exceeding afraid of the wrath of Pharaoh, they had faith in the power of God; they had faith to do what was morally right and godly. It may have cost them their lives, but they were more concerned with obedience to the standard of God than conformity to immorality of man. For in the words of James 4:4, **“...do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”**

And what is interesting is that the displeasure and wrath of man is always visible – is it not? The unbelieving world is quick to show its disapproval of Christian morals and virtue and is quick to pressure believers to conform to a standard other than Gods. This pressure is can create a fear, a fear that says, “If I don’t conform, I won’t fit in, I won’t be accepted and I might even be persecuted.” Beloved, such a fear of man is based upon sight, what you can see – you can see the displeasure of the world. Conversely, you don’t really see the displeasure of God. We know from the Word what displeases Him and truly those whom God loves He disciplines, but the reality is that not fearing man, who we see and rather fear God, whom we cannot see is a matter of faith, which, according to Hebrews 11:1 is the assurance of things hoped for (that I am pleasing God with my life) the conviction of things not seen (the full displeasure and wrath of God on sin).

By faith, Amram and Jochobed resisted the temptation to fear what they could immediately see, the displeasure and wrath of man, in order to experience what they could not immediately see, the pleasure and blessing of God. For as they hid Moses from the authorities and as they eventually placed him in that ark, they could only hope by faith that God would be pleased and God would bless both them and their son. Their faith gave them a confidence

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and trust in the Lord to risk everything in this life in order to honor the Lord. Remember that there were no guarantees that Pharaoh would not discover Moses and punish their entire household. But faith resists the temptation to fear man in order to actively serve God.

And so, we must also, **“by faith”** actively resist the temptation to fear man and therefore conform to the world’s standards and ways of life. Turn with me to 1 Peter 4 and let us read together verses 3-4:

**3 For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. 4 In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.**

We are not to conform to our former ways of living prior to coming to Christ, but we are to know this, that the world will think it strange that you do not conform to their ways and they will speak against you. It is hard to have people speak ill of you and it is a temptation to conform, if not exactly in action, at least in word, to the ways of the world for fear of rejection. But where the world may currently and visibly malign you, “they will [at some point in the future, at a time not currently known and by a judge who is not currently seen] give account...”

In conclusion then, what is it that we have learned concerning faith? Faith actively responds to the person and word God and faith actively resists the influences and intentions of the world. The questions for each of us then are simply these,

1. Do I actively respond to the revealed will of God or am I being passive in some way, waiting for God or others to do something before I act?
2. Do I actively resist the temptation to fear what others think rather than what God states; to conform to ways of thinking or acting that are not faith at all but only sight, what you can see?

May it be our prayer as well as our purpose to actively live out our faith.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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