

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 5c) 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.

The great Puritan preacher, Thomas Watson, made this profound statement: *“The growth of faith is seen by doing duties in a more spiritual manner...When an apple hath done growing in bigness, it grows in sweetness.”*

As we come to Hebrews 11:27-29, let me remind you that we are actually considering two things. First, and foremost, we are considering the nature or character of genuine, saving faith as it revealed in and through the lives of God's people throughout history. Second, and specifically today, we are looking at the final characteristics of faith as they are revealed to us in and through the life of Moses, having already seen that faith acts on the promises of God (11:23), and that faith refuses the temptations and pleasures of this world (11:24-26). In this sense, we have seen the apple of faith “growing in bigness.” In Hebrews 11:27-29 we see three more characteristics of faith that I pray will allow us to see the apple of faith now grow in sweetness. Prayerfully that which we see as the apple of the faith of Moses, as big and as sweet as it is, may also be seen as the apple of the faith of each one here.

This morning I would have you consider with me these three characteristics of faith – namely that faith endures (11:27), that faith expects (11:28), and finally that faith excels (11:29). Remember that our goal through all of this, whether we are considering the faith of Moses or any other person in Hebrews 11, is to examine and evaluate our own faith, to see where our faith is strong and can be encouraged to grow in sweetness; as well as to see where our faith is weak and needs to be encourage to grow in “bigness.”

I. Faith Endures (11:27)

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

Let us begin by being careful not to divorce this message or this verse from the previous context. We noted last week that faith refuses the positions, the prestige and the prosperity of the world when these would interfere with one's devotion and service to God. By faith, Moses gave up a lot this world had to offer. But much like we noted that the word “refused” in verse 24 is a strong word, meaning to “speak against; to disavow; to utterly reject” with reference to Moses' rejection of his position as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, we are offered here in verse

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27 a series of strong words that reveal the faith of Moses, a faith that is to be found in all of God's people, and this then followed by the object of that faith.

Our text begins with that familiar **“by faith”** – which I hope you have come to associate with trusting in the person, promises and provisions of God through Jesus Christ, a trust that results in behavior, a lifestyle consistent with the Word of God. We go on to read that **“by faith, he [Moses] left Egypt...”** I think our NASB has rendered this phrase a bit weak. While the verb “left” can mean simply “to leave” – it is often used in the NT to convey the idea of abandoning, of forsaking, of utterly leaving behind. In connection with verses 24-26, the idea is that Moses, not by reasoning, not by rationalization, not by human consensus, but rather because of his trust in God, forsook, abandoned, and left behind his position, the prestige and the prosperity of Egypt. Let us remember that it is only by faith that anyone, be it Moses or ourselves, would give up the temporary pleasures of this world in order to subject ourselves to the momentary light affliction that has historically been the experience of those who genuinely follow Christ.

By faith Moses left behind the best the world had to offer, which he could see – it was right before him; in order to follow after the LORD and to lead and guide the LORD's people through a hostile desert, to a land with unknown enemies and pitfalls. Moses wanted something more than this world offered. And I would like to know how and why he was able to do this? Don't you? Let us read on.

We next read that **“by faith [Moses was] not fearing the wrath of the king...”** Moses had every earthly and physical reason for fearing Pharaoh. Pharaoh had the power of life and death. Human logic and reasoning would say, “This is a man to be feared”; but Moses was not dependent on human reason alone. Our text does not tell us that Moses did not fear Pharaoh because Moses was bigger, stronger, smarter or more influential. We are not told that Moses did not fear Pharaoh because Moses had two million Hebrews at his side ready to attack Egypt. No, we are told that Moses did not fear this man by virtue of one thing - “by faith” – because of what he believed about God, what he know to be true about God. We will see in just a moment that we need to have a great vision of God, a vision that comes by faith. Moses did not fear man. He did not, in the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 10:28, **“fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul...”** But rather Moses did **“fear Him [that is the LORD] who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”** [consider also Psalm 27:1].

By faith then Moses reverentially, worshipfully feared God rather than irrationally fearing a man. Notice I said that Moses did fear God. Beloved, may I suggest to you that all people must fear something. The Greek word for fear used here and in the NT is always in the passive voice, meaning that fear is something that originates from an outside influence. Often we are tempted to fear many things, but the believer need only have one right and godly fear, that is a reverential worshipful fear of the LORD.

But how is it that Moses was able to forsake the materialism of Egypt and not fear the power of Pharaoh? Let us read on. **“by faith [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.”** Now here's the meat of it all – the reason or the source of his ability to say no to ungodliness and deny worldly desires as that **“he endured.”** He **“endured”** – that sounds pretty man-centered, doesn't it? The word “endured” means to be strong, steadfast or patient. By faith Moses endured, but what was the source of his endurance? It was, **“as seeing Him who is unseen.”** The result of the faith of Moses was that he **“endured”** – we might say it made him strong. But another idea behind

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the word “endured” here is “firmness” – and so we might rightly say that Moses had the Invisible God as though He were firmly before his eyes. [little bear illustration]. Moses had a firm or enduring vision of God. His high view of God was that the experience of God was of greater value than all the riches of Egypt and that the power of God was more awesome than the power of the king.

By faith Moses saw spiritually what Pharaoh’s physical eye was incapable – the worth and power of the LORD. So, when Moses was faced with the temptation of materialism, what did he do? He, by faith, saw the worth of the Invisible God. When Moses faced with the temptation to fear man, what did he do; he, by faith, saw the greater power of God. What is it that you want? What does your heart yearn for? What are the gadgets, gizmos and gains that attract your heart? I say to you that the cure for such earthly heart-longings is a right view of God. A high view of God, seeing Him as more glorious and more awesome gives victory over materialism. By faith, let us want Christ, more of Him.

Additionally, let me ask you, who do you fear? Are you more concerned about what others think about you than God? Once again I say that a right view of God give victory, victory over the fear of man, producing a healthy and happy fear of God. Faith endures; faith allows us to behold the Invisible as though He were firmly before our eyes. This is the apple of faith growing in bigness and sweetness.

II. Faith Expects (11:28)

By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.

Not only does the characteristic of faith as enduring come to light in the life of Moses, but secondly we see from verse 28 that faith expects. Genuine, saving faith expects, it has a real anticipation, expectation. In verse 28 we read [read text]. Faith expects something, actually someone – that someone being a substitute, a sacrifice, a Savior.

By faith Moses is said to have **“kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood...”** The verb “kept” here is in a tense that means Moses instituted this practice and then continued to practice these things over and over. Why? Because of what these practices pictured.

We have already learned from our study of Hebrews that the OT rituals and ceremonies were but shadows of which Christ was the substance. One of the greatest examples of this is the “Passover.” Remember that the Passover was at the tail end of nine plagues designed to humble the Egyptians and their own false worship. God commanded Moses to have the people celebrate the “Passover” with a specially prepared lamb along with a prescribed ritual. The lamb was to be slain and its blood collected so that a branch of hyssop could be dipped into the blood and then sprinkled on the doorframes of the Israelites. The lamb was a substitute so that when the LORD sent the Angel of Death, it might “pass over” the homes of those who were covered with the blood of the innocent lamb, **“so that,”** says the rest of verse 28, **“he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.”**

By faith, Moses instituted and instructed the people in this ritual. If they wanted to live, they must do so God’s way. You might remember through many of the plagues, the Egyptians were seeking to mimic or at least explain away the cause of the destruction. There is another day of destruction coming, when God will destroy the wicked, those who have refused to be covered with the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Sadly, there are many who think they will be able to explain away this destruction. Some teach that God is too merciful, too

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kind to ever cast people into Hell. Yet this is not what God has said in His word. Some simply teach that there is no God at all, therefore no one to be accountable too. Yet the Word says that such a person is a fool. Some teach that by one's own goodness, one's own attempt at living a descent life, pursuing righteousness on their own terms can stay the hand of God.

What I find interesting in our text is that not even Moses, who had obviously had the favor of God, every thought that his own goodness would make him right with God. He knew that just like everyone else, he needed a substitute, a sacrifice, someone to stand in his place. Turn with me to Psalm 49:5-8. Here we see somewhat of a summation of Hebrews 11:27-28 when we read:

5 Why should I fear in days of adversity, When the iniquity of my foes surrounds me, 6 Even those who trust in their wealth And boast in the abundance of their riches? 7 No man can by any means redeem his brother Or give to God a ransom for him — 8 For the redemption of his soul is costly, And he should cease trying forever —

We need not fear man nor trust in our material possession, just as we saw in Hebrews 11:27. Additionally, there should be an expectation. No man can redeem another – therefore we, by faith, should expect a Savior. And we know from the NT that Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb, that He became our substitute to bear the wrath of God which we deserved. Apart from the blood of Christ, all people stand under the curse of eternal destruction. And on the day that the “angel of death” passes over you, while you have been sprinkled with the blood of Christ? Look with me at 1 Thessalonians 5:9. Will you, by faith in the person, promises and provisions of God through Jesus Christ, expect to be ***“not destined for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

Do you believe this? Do you take this by faith? Let me ask you this question – who do you trust? Now think about this – who do you trust? Do you trust in self or in the Savior? Do you trust in others or the Omnipotent? How often we depend on others before we depend upon God. Joseph Hall, another Puritan preach said, *“How shall I depend on Him for raising my body from the dust; and saving my soul at last; if I distrust Him for a crust of bread, toward my preservation.* Faith expects the Savior, knowing the need of man for Him and faith expects the Sovereign to care for him. Let us trust in God for the little and the big, to not only enlarge our apple, but also to make it sweet.

III. Faith Excels (11:29)

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.

Now, let me remind you that we began not with the “faith” of Moses himself, but rather the “faith” of his parents. Then we saw three characteristic of faith as found in Moses himself. As we come to the end of this journey examining the life of Moses, we see that it ends like it begins not with the “faith” of Moses per say, but now with the “faith” of the people of Israel. And as we read verse 29 together, let me state the last point, namely that faith excels. [read text].

I believe that what we see here is that because of the faith of Moses, because of his example of trust, because he looked to the LORD, expecting the fulfillment of promises, enduring in hardship, resolutely and firmly seeing Him who is unseen, that this impacted and

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influenced the faith of the people of Israel to excel, to move forward and beyond what they could see with physical eyes and understand by their reason alone. The example of faith provided by Moses caused the people of Israel to believe God in one of the most spectacular miracles recorded for us in the Scriptures, the parting of the Red Sea as found in Exodus 14.

Our text tells us that **“by faith they passed through the Red Sea...”** This verb “passed” is worth considering for a moment. The Greek word literally means to pass over, or through as to another side. Israel, once and for all, left one location, Egypt, never to return there again. Remember back in verse 27 we noted how Moses, by faith, abandoned Egypt, disavowing position, prestige and prosperity. Similarly, at the time of the crossing, much of Israel was ready to leave behind Egypt and pass once and for all to the other side, the side of promise. To be sure, many of Israel would shortly be crying to go back to Egypt, but the believing remnant passed through not because they did it, or because they thought of it, but because they trusted in the LORD, the God who through the faithful Moses had revealed Himself.

We are reminded that **“by faith”** they **“passed through...as though they were passing through dry land...”** This was a miracle. Again, it was not of their doing – they had to trust God as they went, that the waters would remain receded, that their carts and children would not get stuck in what should have been mud. They passed through what would have been to most a time of anxious panic, doing so “by faith” – with full confidence in God.

On the other hand, we have the Egyptians, those who picture following after the ways of the world. Our text says that **“when they attempted it...”** When they made an attempt to take hold of the situation, how did they do this? Did they do it “by faith”? No, they did not do it by faith, but rather they were trying to lay hold of this path, this way through the tumultuous sea, by force, by their own will and might. And what happened to them? They “were drowned” – literally, they were swallowed up, consumed by the sea. This word “drowned” is the same word used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:54 where we read that “death is swallowed up in victory. It is the same word used by Peter in 1 Peter 5:8 to describe the Christian’s adversary as a “lion” seeking someone to “devour” to “consume” or swallow up.

Beloved, the way of faith ensures safe passage to the other side. The way of faith, of trusting the person, promises and provisions of God through Jesus Christ with the result of behavior consistent to the Word of God is the only way of escape from the wages of sin. The way of the world is a way of pride, a way of self-reliance, a way that depends upon doing things some other way than God’s way. It is interesting that what brought down the army of Pharaoh is pride, that he thought he could cross the sea in his own strength and to his own end. Proverbs 16 has two verses that directly speak to this and of which most of you know. Verse 18 says,

Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling

Again, we can easily see the pride of Egypt in the Exodus 14 account. But Proverbs 16 goes on to say in verse 25,

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death [or destruction].

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Beloved, the way today is not for the purpose of getting from one seashore to another. The way today is to pass from death to life, from sinfulness to righteousness, from eternal damnation to eternal life. The way today is Jesus Christ, who said, **“I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6)**. There are some who try to get from death to life, from damnation to heavenly bliss through pride, through thinking they are good enough, or God is too kind to condemn anyone regardless of what they believe, that way may seem right to man, but its end is death. As Moses lifted up his arms to provide the way of salvation from the Egyptians through the Red Sea, Christ has more dramatically lifted up His arms to provide the way of salvation through our sea of sin, a sea in which we deserved to drown and yet through faith in Christ, believing Him to be the one true sacrifice, the one true substitute for you sin, the one and only Savior, you can pass through as though on dry land. **“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23)**. If you have not already done so, may today be the day of salvation, the day that you cross from death to life, that you pass through the sea of sin not by your own doing, for you are sure to drown, but by and through faith in what Jesus has done.

And for those of us who have come to faith in Christ, let your faith excel, let it grow bigger and sweeter. Let it become an example to others. One of my favorite verses is 1 Timothy 4:16 – please turn there if you would so that you might see with your eyes what I hope you will also hear with your heart –

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

If I might summarize this – excel in your faith, in how you live and what you believe about God – have a godly life and a high-view of God, for in so doing you become to others and example of faith, impacting and influencing the salvation of others to the glory of God.

Beloved, let us pursue a faith that endures, that has the Invisible as though He were firmly before our eyes. Let us have a faith that expects, expecting the Savior, knowing our need of salvation. And let us have a faith that excels, that proceeds forward and grows – delivering us safely to the other side, to glory, to receive our inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for us who are protected by the power of God through “faith” for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Let us be firm in this, let us anticipate this, and let us grow in our excitement of this to both the benefit of our own souls as well as to the souls of those who hear us.

Soli Deo Gloria

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