

Fearless And Self-Denying Faith

Hebrews 11:23-29

Introduction

In this passage we look at the two kinds of faith; one fearless in the face opposition; the other self-less in the face plenty and pleasure. The writer of Hebrews will now mention the parents of Moses and Moses.

The Parent's Of Moses And Fearless Faith (v.23)

Hebrews 11:23–29 (NKJV) 23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

The faith of Moses begins with his parents.

After Joseph's death the people of Israel increased in numbers and prospered. They became a large people group in the land. After many generations the King of Egypt was threatened by their presence. The children of Israel became slaves to the Egyptians. The king that enslaved them thought that he could manage them like cattle by slowing down their reproductive capacities. But Israel increased. The King made it law that all newborn sons would be killed at birth (see Exodus 1:21-22).

The parents of Moses loved the Lord and loved their new-born child. How do we know that the parents of Moses loved the Lord and their new-born child? By their actions! They defied the King's command! The word "beautiful" is translated "proper" in the KJV (*asteion*); Wuest translates the word "comely to God"—or "he was be comely in respect to God" (see Hebrews Vol.2; p.205). What in the world does that mean? Some have suggested that he was beautiful—not simply in the sense of attractive—but rather God's hand was on the child; and it would appear that Moses' parents sensed this supernatural calling—an overwhelming sense of God's plan for the child.

Did the parents of Moses love their child? I think the answer is yes. But Pharaoh or the King's cruel command meant something else as well—if all the male-children were to be killed—the promise of God of a promised seed and a promised land would not come to pass.

Did Moses' parents believe God and did that stir them to disobey the command to kill the children? Did the parents of Moses believe that God would somehow use their child in the plan of an eternal seed and an eternal land for God's people?

The writer of Hebrews makes the point that the parents of Moses' by faith honored and obeyed God even though they themselves would never see the promised seed or the promised land!

The parent's of Moses would defy the King and obey their hearts! They were fearless in the face of a cruel command—that if caught—would cost them their lives.

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Most of you are familiar with the story. Moses is placed in a reed basket and set adrift into the Nile. Moses was only three months old. The parents apparently were aware that the daughter of Pharaoh bathed in this spot in the river—and they sensed—in hope—that she would have compassion on the child; keep him and raise him.

Moses And Self-Denying Faith (vv.24-25)

24By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

According to Jewish tradition the Pharaoh at this time had only one child—a daughter—and she also was childless. If that's the case—Moses would have been the possible heir to the throne. Moses was considered the prince of Egypt. The position allowed Moses all the benefits of spectacular wealth, prestige and honor. Moses had access to the finest schools; possessions, slaves, power. I suspect the daughter of Pharaoh loved her adopted son; defying her father's edict and rescuing the Hebrew child.

“...when he became of age” he had to make a decision. Would he give all this up—sacrifice everything for God—for God's promise—the promised seed and the promised land? Would he identify himself as an Egyptian or the people of God?

We live in a world where some men want to be identified as women; whites as black; ignorant politicians would like to be identified as scientists and immoral people as people of character! Even some Christians would like to be identified as Christians—but reject would has been Biblically or historically embraced by the people of faith.

25choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

According to the Bible Moses may have been about 40 years old when he made this decision. We live in a strange time. Even some Christians think the call to follow Jesus is a call to abundance, prosperity, comfort, ease and plenty.

We are called to love, and joy and peace!

The life of Moses is interesting and strange. Moses was not born the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He found himself heir to incredible wealth, status and power. But Moses will embark on a life that will cause him to give up the world in order to follow the Lord; to obey God's plan and fulfill God's will. By faith, Moses chose God and God's people rather than this world and its pleasures. By faith Moses chose sacrifice rather than self; he was willing to forsake the present for the future; the temporary for the eternal (vv.26-28). Moses would courageously look to God rather than man (v.27) and believed God's message of salvation for himself and his people (v.28).

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The writer of Hebrews continues to add facets to this jewel called faith. Remember his Jewish readers. Remember without faith it is impossible to please God (v.6). The faith of Moses is sacrificial, expectant, enduring, saving!

Note what the text says. Moses did not throw in his future with his people based on blood or family—but by faith. He will identify with his people by faith; he believed God would fulfill His promise to His people—even though all the evidence seemed to indicate those promises were not going to come true anytime soon.

An Expectant Faith (v.26)

26esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

Reproach is a word that has fallen out of favor in the English vocabulary. It means to suffer—rejection—misunderstanding—

The amplified Bible translates this verse; “He considered the contempt and abuse and shame (borne for) the Christ, the Messiah (Who was to come), to be greater wealth than all the treasures of Egypt, for he looked forward and away to the reward (recompense).”

Moses’ faith was an expectant faith. He looks forward to the reward. Moses believed the promises given to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. The word “esteeming” means he considered and thought about the matter; he made a conscious deliberate decision to suffer with his people and inherit the promises God made rather than enjoy the riches of Egypt.

William Barclay:

“Moses was the man who gave up all earthly glory for the sake of the people of God. Christ gave up His glory for men. He became despised and rejected’ He abandoned the glory of heaven for the buffets and the scourging and the shame inflicted by men. Moses in his day and generation shared in the sufferings of Christ. Moses was the man who chose the loyalty that led to suffering rather than the ease which led to earthy glory. He would rather suffer for the right than enjoy luxury with the wrong. He knew that the prizes of earth were contemptible compared with the ultimate reward of God” (The Letter to the Hebrews; p. 178).

What exactly did Moses believe? Did he believe that Israel was the promised seed? Did he believe that God would use this people to bring the Messiah the Savior of the world? Did he believe that Israel would inherit a land and experience peace with God and a rest in the Lord? Moses turned away from the riches of Egypt for the rewards of God’s promises.

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An Enduring Faith (vv.27)

27By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

By faith he forsook (gave up once and for all). I think the reference is not to his first leaving—an event found in Exodus 2:13-14.

“And when he went out the second day, behold two Hebrew men were fighting and he said to the one who did the wrong, “Why are you striking your companion?” (14) Then he said, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” So Moses feared and said, “Surely this thing is known.”

What are we to think? Is this a contradiction? Did Moses flee Egypt because he feared Pharaoh? Yet here in Hebrews the writer says; “not fearing the wrath of the king”. The answer strangely enough is found in Acts 7:23-25 in the famous speech given by Steven; “And when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not”.

What does that mean? Moses understood for some time that God had chosen him to act in some capacity as a deliverer of His people. How is that possible? Did Moses learn he was adopted? Did Moses find out from his mother (his nurse and mother!) about the promises of God to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob? Whatever the source—God’s Spirit moved on Moses at an early age and stirred his heart! Did Moses try to accomplish God’s plan—on his own? In Acts 7:25 Moses was planning to lead Israel in a rebellion against Egypt to free the people from Egypt’s oppression. He did not fear Pharaoh. Moses was filled with courage. What Moses feared was to be left alone—if the people of Israel refused to follow him—fear—in the sense of good sense and discretion—not depression and hopelessness. His was a healthy fear—in order to save his life. Moses—knew God had a mission—Moses was spared for a purpose—to free Israel—but Moses would be used on God’s terms and in God’s timing.

“for he endured. . .as seeing Him who is invisible”—God is invisible. Remember the definition of faith—a practical conviction of the reality of the invisible” and the certainty of the future as that future is revealed to us by God” (v.1-2).

The chapter (Hebrews 11) is full of stories of endurance; terrible torture (v.35b); ridicule (v.36); cruel beatings (v.36c); imprisonment (v.36c); stoning (v.37a); being sawn in two (v.37b); death by sword (v.37c); extreme poverty (v.37d-38). And why did they endure? They saw the invisible City of God (v.10; 13-15; 16b). Moses believed that suffering for the sake of Christ was better than having all the riches of this world (v.26).

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Suffering is a source of endurance (Romans 5:3-4). Endurance is a source of approval and the approval of hope. Later the writer of Hebrews will invite us to “keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection, for the sake of the joy which lay ahead of him, he endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2 NJB). George Matheson said “We conquer—not in any brilliant fashion—we conquer by continuing”.

Take hold—and then hold on.

The second and final time Moses leaves Egypt (Exodus 12:31-36).

A Saving Faith (vv.28-29)

28By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

Moses kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood by faith!

Once again we see the elements of salvation; by blood—innocent blood—shed blood—applied blood. Salvation is always by a person “lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them”—and salvation by grace—a grace preceded by the sinner’s faith and grace followed by a Savior’s peace!

God brought judgment on Egypt in a series of plagues.

At midnight on April 14th—the death angel passed over Egypt. The angel took the firstborn sons from all the unprotected homes—including the very King of Egypt—the household of Pharaoh. On the early morning hours of April 15 all Israel (600,000 men plus women and children leave on their journey.

29By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

The parting of the Red Sea is told in Exodus 14:13-31.

What do the Passover and parting of the Red Sea have in common? They speak of the power of faith and the final difference of the Believer and the Unbeliever.

Conclusion

The parents of Moses made the decision to defy the Pharaoh and his command not to execute their child (v.23b). Moses forsook the pleasures of sin (v.25). Moses left the land of Egypt and refused to fear Pharaoh (v.27b). The people of Israel kept the Passover (v.28b). The people of Israel crossed the Red Sea (v.29). Later they will shout down a city (v.30) and a direct descendant of God’s Messiah will shelter spies (v.31b).

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The chapter invites the reader to consider a kind of faith—not simply to possess faith—but to allow this faith to possess you! I repeat the quote given several studies back; “Belief is a truth held in the mind. Faith is a fire in the heart” (Joseph Fort Newton).

Spurgeon: “Faith is reason at rest in God”.

We would remember the context of the faith described:

Abel offered by faith a blood sacrifice and was accepted.

Enoch walked with God by faith and God took him to heaven without seeing death.

Noah saw a judgment in the future by faith and built an ark and saved his family.

Abraham did not know where he should go or what he should do until by faith he believed God and God’s Word and then by faith left his home, lived as a pilgrim, and went wherever God led him. He believed God’s promise and believed in a land. He was willing by faith to offer his son—when the only way God’s promise could come true would be to bring his son back to life.

By faith Isaac believed the Word passed down to him by his father and conferred the blessing on Jacob.

By faith Jacob—in spite of failure—had faith in God’s Word and blessed Ephraim and Manasseh before he died.

By faith Joseph knew that Israel would one day be delivered from Egypt for this is what God promised Abraham—this in spite of living out—unspeakable deprivation—abuse—incarceration and trial—only to be exalted and serve as a type of Savior for his father and family.

By faith Moses’ parents hid Moses because God told them (in some way) that Moses was special and that God had a special plan for Moses.

By faith Moses—himself refused the position of exaltation and chose to identify himself with an oppressed and enslaved people; Moses experienced the rewards of faith—rather than the temporary pleasures of sin for a season. Faith in the Word that led to a Passover (how the Egyptians must have laughed at the thought of blood doing anything!); and a deliverance (the parting of the Sea).

In a very real sense Moses—refused to give in or give up the fight.

These are the last public words of William Booth (founder of the Salvation Army) at age 82; almost blind—before an audience of ten thousand at Royal Albert Hall in London;

While women weep as they do now, I’ll fight.

While children go hungry as they do now, I’ll fight.

When men go to prison, in and out, I’ll fight

While there is a drunkard left, I’ll fight

While there is a poor girl left on the streets, I’ll fight

While there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I’ll fight.

I’ll fight—I’ll fight to the very end.