

“An Anchor for the Soul: Faith That Leads”

Hebrews 11:23-29

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In all of the Old Testament, the most important people in the history of the Jewish people are Abraham, who we studied the last two weeks, and Moses. While Abraham is considered the father of the Jewish people, Moses is the father of the Jewish religion. Moses was Israel's greatest prophet, lawgiver, historian, and, of course, deliverer. The book of Deuteronomy, at the very end of the Pentateuch, the Torah, ends saying, “there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.”

The Exodus from Egypt, led by Moses, then, is certainly the most important *event* in the Old Testament, and so it's only natural to include him in the roll call of faith we find in Hebrews 11. In our passage this morning we find five acts of faith from the life of Moses. Each of these acts of faith begins with the words, “By faith...” We know these weren't the only times Moses acted by faith. The Bible records many things he did by faith. But Hebrews 11 mentions these five because they were times in his life when faith made the crucial difference.

As we look at these five we find that each one comes at a moment of great crisis or stress. One of the great benefits of this study is that we learn how to handle by faith the stress or crises that we eventually face. It's not a question of whether we will encounter problems or crises in life. We all have to deal with stuff sometimes. The question is really how you will respond. So let's learn to respond in faith. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Or as we said a few weeks ago, “True faith...is a solid conviction resting on God's words that makes the future present and the invisible seen.”

The first crisis comes at the time of Moses' birth. The Hebrew people had become slaves in Egypt, where they had been for over 400 years. The Egyptians began to oppress them and force them to work on their massive construction projects. But just as God had promised Abraham, the Hebrew people multiplied. The more the Egyptians mistreated them, the more their population grew. This worried Pharaoh. In Exodus 1:22 we read, “Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, ‘Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.’” John Piper points out that this was a double threat. There was the threat to the life of the babies but there's also a threat against the parents if they disobeyed.

Verse 23 says, “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.” The word beautiful here doesn't really refer to physical beauty. In both the Greek of this passage and the Hebrew of the story in Exodus, the word means “good” or “special.” In the face of Pharaoh's threat, Moses' parents hide him for three months because they could see that there was something special about him. I want you to imagine trying to hide a newborn baby for three months. Having a newborn baby is hard enough, but in their case the sound of him crying could mean the punishment of death for all of them. Talk about stress!

Moses' parents showed tremendous courage. Faith does that. Faith delivers us from fear. Faith gives us courage. It was faith that gave David the courage to face Goliath. It was faith that gave Daniel and his friends the courage to stand firm before the king of Babylon, even in the lion's den or the fiery furnace. It was faith that gave Moses the courage to stand before Pharaoh and say, “let my people go.” And it's faith that will give you

the courage to do the right thing in the face of opposition from even friends or family.

I don't want us to miss the impact that the faith of Moses' parents had on him. Not only was his life saved by their faith, but he grew up learning that same faith in God. Today's Mother's Day, a day we set aside to celebrate mothers for their hard work raising their families. That hard work includes passing on their faith to their children. Please don't underestimate the importance of teaching your children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren faith in Jesus. Teaching them the faith is much more than just telling them. It's showing them. Do they see you reading your Bible and praying? Do they know that Jesus is the most important thing in your life? Do you worship with them? Your courageous faith may be the thing that makes the difference in their lives.

The second crisis point comes when Moses is an adult. "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin." Moses was raised with all the privilege of Egyptian royalty. But he also grew up knowing his Hebrew heritage. This caused him to have an identity crisis. He had to answer the question, "who am I?" He had to make a choice. Exodus 2:11 tells us that one day Moses left the palace and visited "his people," the Hebrews. He saw an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrew people. So he looked around to make sure no one was watching and he struck down the Egyptian. He killed the man and buried him in the sand.

What's important about this is that Moses had made up his mind. He had made a carefully calculated decision to give up all the benefits of royalty in order to return to God's people. In other words, this was not a spur of the moment thing. Verse 24 is clear that he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," and then verse 25 says he chose to be mistreated with the people of God. Verse 26 makes it even clearer when it says he "considered." He thought out

the pros and cons of each side. He counted the cost. On one side was money and prestige and power and pleasure. The things so many people today chase after. On the other side was mistreatment and reproach. But on that side is also Christ and the people of God, which he realized was much more valuable. It's still the same today. There is nothing more valuable than having a close, personal relationship with Christ and with His people. That's why the Church is so important. The fellowship that comes with the community of believers is what makes suffering bearable. Because it's in that community that we experience Christ's presence. It's just not likely that you will have a growing relationship with Jesus if you don't have a relationship with His body, the church.

The third crisis comes after Moses kills the Egyptian. He learns that people did see it and that Pharaoh plans to kill *him*. Verse 27 says, "By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible." This is a fascinating way to look at this because it sure seems like he was afraid. The point here is not whether he was scared but whether that fear is what motivated his behavior. The answer comes in one word in verse 27 – "endured." Another way to say it would be persevered. What did Moses endure or persevere? His decision to trust God. He had made that decision before he learned that Pharaoh wanted to kill him. In fact, he probably could have gone back to Pharaoh and straightened everything out. But he remained faithful to his decision to commit his life to God. So he left Egypt for the wilderness. It was in that wilderness of Midian that Moses learned to be a servant instead of a master. He learned that faith means being led by God. It took 40 years to learn that lesson.

The final two statements on faith deal with Moses as a leader. The result of faith that is led by God is faith that leads others. God called Moses to return to Egypt to lead the people out of slavery. Day after day he courageously went to Pharaoh to request that the people be released to go worship. You are all familiar with

the plagues that God sent through Moses and Aaron on Egypt. The plagues were actually direct challenges to the various Egyptian gods. The sun god was challenged when the Lord sent darkness. One of Egypt's gods was in the form of a frog and you remember how Moses called all the frogs up from the river.

Verse 28 says, "By faith Moses kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them." The final plague challenged Pharaoh himself, who was thought to be a god, by striking down his first-born son, along with all the others. God commanded the Israelites to sacrifice a perfect lamb and sprinkle some of the blood on the doorposts of their house as a sign. They had never done anything like this before but they listened to Moses and obeyed and they were saved.

Finally we come to the culmination of Moses' leadership – the Exodus. "By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned." Ironically, the people were not saved by their own faith. In fact, as soon as they saw the Egyptians coming after them they began to complain against Moses. But because of Moses' unswerving faith in God's power to save them, they made it safely to the other side. Moses chose to believe God, to trust His word, and it impacted the entire community.

Much like the ancient Hebrews and much like the little house church in Rome facing persecution, *we* find we live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith. And we must decide how we will respond because we will be tempted. We will be tempted to be afraid or to give in to the political pressure. We are tempted every day to seek the pleasures and riches of Egypt, which the Bible calls fleeting pleasures. Moses figured this out. He said, "I have all the money in the world and it's not making me happy. There's something else. We are tempted, like Moses and like Abraham, to try to solve this ourselves.

The Christian life, however, is primarily about making choices. It's about choosing to trust God. It's choosing to do what's right and choosing to take risks for God. When's the last time you took a risk in following Christ? What do those risks look like? Maybe it's just talking to somebody about how much Jesus has done for you. Maybe it's loving the "wrong" people. The Christian life is choosing to be mistreated with the people of God, choosing to endure. The Christian life is about the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Do you have that assurance? Do you have that conviction?

Amen