

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD II: MOSES VALUED CHRIST MORE THAN THE TREASURES OF EGYPT

Hebrews 11:17-28

Key Verse: 11:26

“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”

Last week the Supreme Court declared gay marriage to be legal in all 50 states. It was really shocking and very discouraging. They did not follow the truth of God, but the trend of public opinion. As a result, as the National Association of Evangelicals has declared, “In its role as a moral teacher, the law now misleads Americans about the true nature of marriage.”¹ We have prayed for America to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But it is turning out to be more like Sodom and Gomorrah. Anti-Christian sentiment is growing day by day. This means that to live as Christians in America will become increasingly counter-cultural, and persecution is inevitable. So, many people are afraid. When fear creeps into people’s hearts, they begin to shrink back and are tempted to compromise. This is the same problem which Hebrew Christians faced. The author challenged them to live by faith and not shrink back (10:38). In today’s passage, he gave the practical examples of the patriarchs and of Moses, who was regarded as the founder of Judaism. Their hope was not in this world but in the heavenly city. Their treasure was not earthly but heavenly. Especially, Moses regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward. This hope that looks forward to God’s reward is an essential element of our Christian faith. God’s reward is not a worldly treasure, but an everlasting treasure in heaven. The question is: “Where is my hope?” “Where is my treasure?” This means, “Where is my heart?” Jesus said, **“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** (Mt 6:21). What we really value from our hearts will guide our decisions and life direction. Let’s see how the patriarchs and Moses lived by faith.

First, the patriarchs’ faith (17-22). In verses 8-16, the author focused on how the patriarchs lived by faith in this world. They lived in tents as aliens and strangers, but they did not grumble or complain. They were thankful and joyful because their hope was in heaven. Now, in verses 17-22, the author described the essence of the faith of the patriarchs: they kept their faith to the end and passed God’s blessing to the next generation.

¹ <http://nae.net/god-defined-marriage>.

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD II: MOSES VALUED CHRIST MORE THAN THE TREASURES OF EGYPT

By faith, Abraham offered Isaac as his expression of love for God (17-19). Abraham received Isaac as God's blessing after 25 years of living by faith. Isaac was the one and only son in Abraham's home, whom he loved dearly. One day God tested Abraham by asking him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. It was really challenging. Abraham could have doubted God's love and become bitter about such a hard and unreasonable command. Abraham could have reminded God of his own word that man should not shed the blood of man because man is made in the image of God (Gen 9:6). Moreover, it seemed to contradict God's covenant promise: **"It is through Isaac that your offspring shall be reckoned"** (18; Gen 21:12). Abraham could have argued with God, saying, "You are breaking the covenant!" Abraham could have lost trust in God and abandoned his faith. Abraham, however, fully trusted God and offered Isaac to God. How could he do this? Verse 19a says, **"Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead."** Usually, when people are asked to do something unreasonable, they become very emotionally upset. They cannot think clearly but only become crazy. But Abraham "reasoned." It means that he thought about God's command in light of God's promise and with reverence for God. He reasoned about how God had called him and raised him thus far. When he reasoned about what God had done and who God is, he was fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised (Ro 4:21). Then he could be sure that God would keep his promise without fail. It meant that God would raise Isaac back from death. Abraham proved that he loved God most. God was moved by his faith and gave Isaac back to him. Then God confirmed his promise to Abraham with an oath. Based on this promise God laid the foundation for his world salvation plan and made Abraham a source of blessing for the whole world. Here we learn that when God tests our hearts, we need to reason based on God's promise. Then we can realize that everything came from God, including our lives and our children. We brought nothing into the world; we can take nothing out of it. When we reason based on God's truth, we can offer our best to God willingly; we can love God most and bear his blessings.

By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future (20). The course of Jacob and Esau's lives were set based on the blessing given by their father Isaac. Isaac did not bless them arbitrarily or randomly. Isaac blessed them according to God's will, giving the right blessing to the right person. Though Esau was the oldest son, the covenant blessing was passed on to Jacob, by the help of Rebekah. Many people who receive a material or spiritual blessing fail in the matter of passing it on. But Isaac's legacy is that he received God's blessing from his father Abraham and enjoyed it and passed it on to the right person, Jacob.

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD II: MOSES VALUED CHRIST MORE THAN THE TREASURES OF EGYPT

By faith, Jacob blessed Joseph's sons and worshiped God (21). Jacob struggled hard with his brother Esau and his Uncle Laban to obtain the honor of the firstborn son, marry the woman he loved and become wealthy. In the course of obtaining these blessings, he hurt others and he was hurt by others. But later, when he was dying, by faith he blessed Joseph's two sons, elevating them from the position of grandsons to his own sons. God honored Jacob's faith and blessed Joseph's sons to become two of the tribes of Israel. Jacob had a strong character and solved most problems with his own ability. He did pray one time, in an emergency. But later he realized that the Lord had been his shepherd all the days of his life and he worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. He acknowledged the Lord as the source of all his blessings and the Sovereign Ruler. He surrendered himself to God. God wants all of his children to worship him like this.

By faith, Joseph planted hope of the Promised Land in the hearts of his descendants (22). Joseph was an unintentional immigrant to Egypt, an advanced country, at the age of 17. He became prime minister of Egypt at age 30, married an Egyptian woman, and lived the rest of his life there, until he died at age 110. He must have been deeply immersed in the Egyptian lifestyle. But he kept his faith as a man of God in the midst of an idol-worshiping society. He foresaw the exodus of Israel from Egypt based on God's promise to Abraham (Gen 15:13-16). He gave instructions to have his bones buried in the Promised Land. In this way he planted hope of deliverance and return to the Promised Land. Ultimately this hope was in the kingdom of God.

These patriarchs believed God's promise and lived by faith to the end. Humanly speaking, they had many weaknesses. But they valued God's blessing as the most important legacy and passed this on to the next generation. God worked through them to extend his blessing to future generations. As parents, we want to do many things for our children to help them succeed in their lives. So we take them to music lessons and sports activities and hire various kinds of tutors. But the most important thing to pass on is our faith in God and his promise of blessing. I pray that in this matter we may all be like the patriarchs of faith.

Second, Moses' faith (23-28). When we observe many great people, we find that they were born and raised in unfavorable or even tragic circumstances. Moses is one of them. Exodus 1-2 tells us the background of his birth. By this time, the people of Israel had become very numerous in Egypt because of God's blessing upon them. Israelite women were vigorous and strong and bore many children. But Egyptian women were only interested in fashion and pleasure and did not have

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD II: MOSES VALUED CHRIST MORE THAN THE TREASURES OF EGYPT

many children. The Egyptian leaders were afraid that the Israelites would overpower them and take over the nation. So they made the Israelites slaves and tried to control them in various ways. At the time of Moses' birth, the Pharaoh issued an edict that all the baby boys born to Israelite parents were to be drowned in the Nile River. Most parents were afraid and lost their newborn sons. In this situation no leaders could be raised among the Israelites. There was no hope for Israel. In such a desperate time Moses was born. Moses' life and destiny were totally in his parents' hands. What did they do? By faith they hid him for three months. It was because they saw he was no ordinary child. Well, most parents think that their children are not ordinary, but geniuses and superstars. But Moses really was extraordinary. His parents had the eyes of faith to see him from God's perspective. So they risked their own lives to protect him for three months. How could they do that? They believed God—who was at work according to his promises and who rules over all things. So they were not afraid of Pharaoh. They made a basket, put Moses inside, and placed it in the river near the place where Pharaoh's daughter bathed. They entrusted Moses' life to God's hand. Pharaoh's daughter had compassion on him and adopted him as her son. In this way, he not only survived, but grew up as a leader. It was through the faith of his parents. Without parents who fear God, there is no Moses.

Though Moses grew up in Pharaoh's palace, he was cared for by his own mother, whom Pharaoh's daughter had hired as his nanny. He was educated by his mother to know the God of Israel and their history. At the same time, he was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and became powerful in speech and action (24; Ac 7:22). When he reached adulthood, he had a decision to make. It was whether to live as a son of Pharaoh's daughter or to identify with the Israelite slaves. To live as the son of Pharaoh's daughter meant to keep all the privileges he had received as an Egyptian. To identify with his people meant to be outcast and mistreated. It meant to betray the love of his Egyptian mother and others who had cared for him. It meant going from wealth to poverty, from honor to disgrace, from freedom to bondage, from power to weakness. Every human being has the desire for power. Once they seize power, they never give it up. To identify with his people Moses would pay a high price. There were many reasons for Moses to live as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. It seemed impossible for him to refuse. But by faith Moses refused. He chose instead to be mistreated along with his people.

Why not try to live as both an Egyptian prince and an Israelite? Then he could use his privileged position to help his people. This may sound appealing, but the two worlds are essentially opposed to one another. Living as the son of

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD II: MOSES VALUED CHRIST MORE THAN THE TREASURES OF EGYPT

Pharaoh's daughter was synonymous with enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. It meant belonging to the world which was influenced by Satan. Worldly people sought self-glory, and to enjoy pleasure and the privileges of being served. On the other hand, living as an Israelite was to love God and have hope in his kingdom. It was to seek God's glory. In order to do that Moses had to deny his sinful desires and decide to suffer with the people of God. There is no way to serve both God and the world. Jesus said, **"No one can serve two masters"** (Mt 6:24a). Moses knew the essence of both kinds of life. So he did not try to live a compromised life. He made a clear decision to refuse the fleeting pleasures of sin and to identify as one of the people of God. How could he do that?

First, Moses had a clear value system. He knew that the treasures of Egypt were like the fleeting pleasures of sin. In the palace people could enjoy parties with gourmet food, fine clothes, and many amusements. Palace life is luxurious and comfortable and a lot of fun. But it is fleeting; it is temporary. When the thrill is over, there is no meaning and feelings of futility and guilt follow. Palace life bears the fruit of sin which is ultimately death. Moses knew this well. Psalm 90:10 and 12 record his words, **"Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away...Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom"** (Ps 90:10,12). Indeed, as Isaiah and Peter said, "all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever" (1Pe 1:24-25a). When we suffer as the people of God, we find meaning and purpose and bear good fruit which lasts forever. This is what Moses valued. With this value system, he could go the way of suffering with confidence.

Second, Moses was looking ahead to his reward. Let's read verse 26. **"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."** The author here credits Moses with seeing the day of Christ and participating in his suffering. Just as Abraham foresaw the day of Christ, so also Moses foresaw the day of Christ with the eyes of faith (Jn 8:56; Dt 18:15). Old Testament heroes of faith lived for the coming of Christ as the main event in God's salvation history. In anticipation of the day of Christ, Moses was willing to suffer any disgrace. Moses' example was a great encouragement to the Hebrew believers. By implication, the author suggests that they follow Moses' example and willingly bear disgrace for the sake of Christ. Moses suffered a lot in order to lead his people to the Promised Land. But his suffering was nothing compared to what Christ suffered. Christ was despised and

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD II: MOSES VALUED CHRIST MORE THAN THE TREASURES OF EGYPT

rejected by men. He was mocked, insulted, beaten, whipped and finally crucified. He shed his precious, holy blood and poured out his life as a ransom sacrifice. It was for all of our sins. But that was not the end. God raised him from the dead and exalted him as Savior and Lord, so that before him every knee would bow and every tongue confess. Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty. Jesus is forever glorious as King of kings and Lord of lords. When Moses decided to share in Christ's suffering, he was looking ahead to sharing heavenly glory with Jesus. This is the reward for anyone who decides to follow Jesus as Moses did.

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield was an English Professor at Syracuse University, specializing in women's studies. She had a lesbian partner with whom she owned two homes. These homes were open for students who freely came and went, spending hours discussing relevant issues and plans for social activism. While researching a paper to critique the religious right, she published an article which was read by a local pastor. The pastor sent her a kind, but thought-provoking letter. This led to a personal relationship with him and his wife, who embraced her with love and understanding and shared the truth of God with her. After a couple of years, Rosaria felt a deep conviction of sin. She accepted Jesus as her personal Savior. She is sure that Jesus is living, that he is who the Bible says he is, and that he loves her. After much struggle, and with trembling, she publicly confessed her faith in Christ. She did so through a lecture that people expected to be feminist and anti-Christian. She describes the result on her life as a train wreck. She lost everything: her professor position, her social status, and her friends. People who had been very dear to her felt betrayed by her. Her whole life was turned upside down. But she gained Christ. She now loves to hear God's word proclaimed truthfully in the Spirit. She has married a pastor and they have opened their home for Bible studies with many young people. Her hope is in the glorious inheritance that Jesus gives.² She valued Christ more than anything. I pray that many young people may find Christ and value him most.

Verses 27-28 tell us what Moses did after he made his decision: he led Israel during the Exodus³ and kept the Passover. The Exodus can be compared to

² Butterfield, Rosaria Champagne. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: an English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*. Crown & Covenant Publications: Pittsburgh, PA, 2012.

³ There are two opinions about what the words "By faith he left Egypt" refer to. One is Moses' flight from Egypt after killing an Egyptian. The other is the Exodus. The first opinion is supported by the author's apparent use of a chronological rendering of events. However, the author does not follow a chronological order in many of the events he describes. In verse 32, he mentions Gideon before Barak, and Samson before Jephthah, and Samuel

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD II: MOSES VALUED CHRIST MORE THAN THE TREASURES OF EGYPT

Independence Day in America, but it has a much deeper meaning. It represents God's deliverance of mankind from the power of sin and Satan in his world salvation plan. God sent Moses to confront Pharaoh and deliver his people from Egyptian bondage. Moses needed faith in God to do this. Humanly speaking, Pharaoh was the mightiest man on earth and Moses was a fugitive criminal. Moses seemed to be no match for Pharaoh; it was like throwing an egg at a rock and expecting the rock to break. Whenever Pharaoh got angry, he wanted to kill Moses. But by faith Moses persevered; it was because he saw him who is invisible—the King of kings. The Exodus cannot be separated from the Passover. Verse 28 says, **“By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.”** Exodus was possible when the blood of the Passover lambs was shed. It was not easy for Moses to keep the Passover. How could the blood of a lamb on a doorframe save them from the Destroyer? But by faith Moses kept the Passover and the Israelites were saved. The Passover lamb foreshadows the coming of Jesus as the Lamb of God. By his blood, Jesus delivers us from the power of sin and Satan.

When we think about the faith of the patriarchs and Moses, we learn the importance of holding on to God's promise and faith that perseveres. Especially from Moses we learn that Christ is more valuable than any other treasures in the world. This helps us to make a right decision to refuse the fleeting pleasure of sin and to participate in the suffering of Christ. God is surely pleased by such faith and rewards it richly.

before David, reversing the chronological order. Moreover, the words of verse 27, “not fearing the king's anger,” contradict Moses' fear described in Exodus 2:14. So verse 27 most likely refers to the Exodus.