

# Faith that Rejects the World

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[0:00] We're going to read together from Hebrews 11, verses 23 to 28, and then David is going to come after we sing and preach for us. 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.

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.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith, he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured a seeing him who is invisible.

By faith, he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. This is God's holy word.

Over the past couple of months, we've been making our way through the text of Hebrews 11. It's a chapter, a famous chapter in the Bible. It's sometimes been described as a portrait gallery of faith.

[1:18] And as we've made our way through, we've been taking time to stop and consider these pictures of faith that our author has selected for display.

The first room, I suppose, that we walked through in this portrait gallery. We might have called that the Genesis Gallery, lining the way some of the great Old Testament saints from the opening book of the Bible.

Abel, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. And the lives of these men and women are really held up as a powerful witness to God's faithfulness and keeping grace.

They lived and died in faith as they looked forward to that city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. Amid a sometimes hostile, antagonistic world, they each lived by faith in the power and promises of God.

And this evening, however, we step, as it were, from the Genesis Gallery into the Exodus Gallery. And if the main portrait hanging in our first gallery was that of Abraham, then here in the Exodus Gallery, it is the figure of Moses that dominates.

[2:41] And in these verses tonight, our author wants us to stop and consider the life and faith of one of the most significant figures in all of the Old Testament.

He wants us to hear what the life of Moses, this great leader of God's people in the Exodus from Egypt, has to tell us about living by faith.

And in this section that Corrie read for us that reads from verse 23 to 28, you might notice that there are really four pictures that are presented to us, each beginning with the words, by faith.

I want to consider each of those in turn tonight. And the first that we see here is not really to do with Moses' own faith, but rather with the faith of his parents.

We have that in verse 23. 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.

[3:48] Faith does not fear worldly power. Faith does not fear worldly power. The reference here of verse 23 takes us back to Exodus chapter 2, 1 and 2, really.

As I mentioned, it relates not to Moses' own faith, but rather to the faith of his parents, Amram and Jochebed. And if you're familiar with the story, you might recall how in Egypt there arose a pharaoh who, we're told, knew not Joseph.

Because of the increasing numbers of Hebrews, this pharaoh embarked on a course of government-sponsored genocide, decreeing that all the male children born in the Israelite community should be drowned in the Nile.

However, Moses' parents didn't comply with the king's edict. Instead, they hid their baby son for some three months before eventually launching him down the river in a basket to be found by the daughter of Pharaoh.

An act of faith, not fear. And that little phrase that we read there, they saw that the child was beautiful. I think it's to be understood in the sense that they saw that their child was special.

[5:16] Well, we all think our children are special. But I think the sense here is that he had a particular destiny to fulfill. They saw and believed that God's favor in some way rested upon him.

And the writer of Hebrews sees that there was faith at work in the actions of Moses' parents. They were prepared to defy the law of the land in order to preserve and keep their child safe.

Fear did not keep them from doing what was right. Disobeying, I suppose, an edict of the king of Pharaoh was a capital offense. If it was discovered, it would have meant their certain death.

And yet they acted in faith, not fear. They didn't flinch from disobeying the king and his decree. They engaged in, I suppose we might say, a policy of civil disobedience.

They feared God rather than man. They were more concerned to please the king of kings than they were the king of Egypt. They were prepared to anger Pharaoh rather than anger God.

[6:25] And that's a very important principle. And it's one that we see repeated right throughout the Scriptures. There are times when traveling the way of faith means that we are compelled, really, to rebel against what rulers, authorities, or governments may demand of us.

Sometimes doing what God wants us to do will bring us into conflict with those in authority and power. However, as Christians, we are duty-bound to obey God rather than men.

Yes, of course, there is a right and lawful obedience that we owe to the state and government because we recognize God's authority behind it. We discover that in passages like Romans 13.

But we must disobey if the government forbids what God commands or commands what God forbids. Our absolute loyalty and devotion is for God alone.

And that's something that we, again, see not just in Scripture, but right down through the history of the Christian church. The Reformers, the Covenanters. We see it today in different parts of the world also.

[7:43] And maybe here in Britain in the near future, we might have to face that same kind of challenge. Obey God or obey men.

We think of things like the proposed conversion therapy ban. Well, conceivably, it could lead to evangelism and the sharing of the Christian faith being effectively outlawed.

What might that mean for the church? What might that mean for us as Christians? God is the ultimate authority. The state's power is not absolute.

And so it can't demand of us absolute obedience. If the state commands what God forbids or forbids what God demands, our duty is to disobey.

And so, back in the book of Exodus, in Exodus 1, the Jewish midwives there, we're told, feared God and disobeyed the king. In Daniel 6, a passage that we looked at, Corrie looked at a couple of weeks ago, Daniel prayed to God in defiance of the king's decree.

[8:53] In Acts 5, we read of Peter and John saying, what? We must obey God rather than men. I don't doubt that Moses' parents were afraid at the prospect of being executed for their actions, but they refused to... what they refused to do was allow that fear to shape and control their decision.

They did what God wanted, even at risk of their own personal safety. And traveling the way of faith means that sometimes we have to face our fears, fear of what others may think or even do to us.

Faith does not fear worldly power, no matter how great or terrifying it may be. And that brings me to the second thing here.

Faith chooses, you'll notice, in verses 24 through 26, faith chooses to suffer with the people of God. 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.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Those verses, I think, are all in one sentence in the original language.

[10:24] And they relate to the fundamental, I suppose, the defining decision of Moses' life. And that was his decision to turn his back on the comfort and security of Egypt and to identify himself with the suffering people of God.

Human life, as we all know, is full of tough choices. I think it's in this film, The Bridges of Madison County, Meryl Streep says to Clint Eastwood, We are the choices we make.

That's certainly true here of Moses. In God's providence, he was led to a point of decision, a moment of truth. And that decision revealed just where his heart truly lay.

And sometimes God brings us, his people, to such moments to reveal, to disclose, just where our loyalties really lie.

What is really important in our lives? Moses, though a Hebrew, was raised as Egyptian royalty. Stephen, in Acts chapter 7, in his speech there, Acts 7.22, says, Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.

[11:47] In other words, he had a very privileged upbringing. I have no doubt he was tempted to remain in Egypt as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

He would have enjoyed a life of luxury and worldly pleasure. But a choice had to be made. And God led him into the valley of decision.

And the choice he was faced with was between being called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, enjoying the security, safety, the great treasures of Egypt, and being mistreated with the despised, suffering people of God.

Some choice. And yet we're told here that Moses turned his back on Egypt and on all it could offer him. He wanted to help his people.

He wanted to see his people delivered. He could have reasoned, I suppose, that staying in the royal palace, working behind the scenes, might have been the best way to go.

[12:59] But he resisted that temptation and turned his back on it all. Sometimes faith is known by what it refuses to do.

Faith is known by what it says no to. There is often this negative side to traveling the way of faith. Paul says, Titus 2.12, the grace of God teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions.

The psalmist, Psalm 1 verse 1, blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, does not stand in the way of sinners, and does not sit in the seat of scoffers.

Moses said no to Egypt and yes to Israel. He didn't sit on the fence. He had a clarity of thought that saw all the treasures of Egypt for what they really were, the fleeting pleasures of sin.

And he chose to identify himself with his people. Well, that's true of all of us. We belong in one camp or the other.

[14:13] We belong to Egypt or we belong to the Israel of God. We're either storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven or on earth.

We're either living for God or for ourselves. I wonder where you stand tonight. I wonder where your heart belongs this evening.

Will you stand with God's people? Even if that means you won't really fit in in this world.

Even if it means you'll be, always be a bit of an outsider. Maybe in your work or place of employment. Maybe in your family. Maybe in your community.

Will you call sin for what it really is? A fleeting and worthless pleasure. Or are you someone trying to keep a foot in both camps?

[15:22] Pulling out your Egyptian passport when it suits? Too many of us are content to live like that. But that's not how faith works.

Moses' choice had this twofold aspect. In order to say yes to Israel and God's people, he had to say no to Egypt. That is, he had to say no to Egypt's values, worldview, and religion.

He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. What about you tonight? What are you saying yes to?

And what are you saying no to in your life? Moses certainly chose a hard and difficult path. He chose to suffer with the people of God.

Exodus 2 verse 11, we read, one day when Moses had grown up, he went out to his brothers and looked on their burdens. By faith, he chose a path that meant for him shame and his grace.

[16:37] Following Jesus Christ does not mean following the path of least resistance. It means identifying ourselves wholeheartedly with the people of God, with the church of God.

God. Back in July 1939, on the threshold of World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and pastor, he traveled to the United States of America.

He was offered safe haven by some of his friends there. But incredibly, Bonhoeffer left New York almost as soon as he arrived.

He chose to return to the rising chaos and confusion in his native Germany. This is what he wrote. I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America.

I shall have no right to take part in the restoration of Christian life in Germany after the war unless I share the trials of this time with my people.

- [17:44] He traveled the way of faith, a Moses-like commitment. I think about 10, 15 years ago I visited Mei La refugee camp for the Karen people in the Thai-Myanmar border.
- At that time it was a huge camp of about 35,000 people effectively imprisoned there, unable to go anywhere. It was refugees, they couldn't enter Thailand, it was unsafe for them to travel back to the Karen state in Myanmar because of the military.
- And they had a Bible school there led by a man called Pastor Simon. He was not a refugee. He had a passport. He was free to travel. He had family in Canada.
- And yet for 25 years he chose not to flee to a life of relative safety and security, but rather to live, serve, and eventually die amongst his suffering and displaced people.
- A Moses-like commitment. Who knows when you and I might be called to make a similar choice, to choose what appears to be a hard and unpopular way, to leave the safe and the secure for the demanding and the costly.
- [19:04] Look at how the writer puts it in verse 26. Astonishing words. He considered the reproach of Christ, greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.
- Moses chose the disgrace of the Messiah. For the suffering of the people of God and the reproach of Christ are one and the same in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- When God's people suffer, Christ suffers. Jesus is so united and connected to his people that when they suffer, he suffers.
- That's an astonishing thing to think about and to reflect on. Remember Jesus' words to Saul on the road to Damascus in Acts 9?
- Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting the church? No. Why are you persecuting me? Isaiah 63, 9, in all their affliction, he was afflicted.
- [20:16] The affliction of God's people is the affliction of Christ himself. Some of you may have heard of the Wigton martyrs back in 1685.
- Margaret McLaughlin, Margaret Wilson, tied to stakes on the sands of the Solway Firth, executed for their faith and loyalty to Jesus Christ.
- When asked what she thought of her fellow sufferer wrestling in the water as the tide came in, Margaret Wilson replied, what do I see but Christ mystical wrestling there?
- What do I see but Jesus suffering there? Jesus Christ suffers in and with his people. Exodus 3, 7, the Lord says, surely I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and I've heard their cry because of their taskmasters.
- I know their sufferings. So friend, if you're called upon to suffer for the sake of Christ, to bear the reproach of Christ and your family amongst your colleagues, if you're called to suffer for the sake of the gospel, you do not suffer alone because Jesus Christ is always with his people.
- [21:57] He will never leave you, he will never forsake you. Sometimes faith means choosing a path that will lead to suffering along with the people of God.
- Faith does not fear worldly power. Faith chooses to suffer with the people of God. Thirdly here, faith keeps looking to the Lord. Verse 27, by faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, but he endured as seeing him who is invisible.
- Now, what is the writer speaking about here? There are two main possibilities. One, that this is a general statement about the exodus. Moses left Egypt, leading the children of Israel, not fearing the anger of the king, not fearing Pharaoh.
- The other possibility is that it's a reference to the time when Moses fled Egypt, traveled into the desert, to Midian, where he lived as a sojourner and as an exile.

And that's a better fit chronologically. Whatever view we take, the point is the same. Moses set his eyes upon God.

- [23:14] He endured a seeing him who is invisible. He kept going in the way of faith because he was looking to the Lord. He was not looking to an earthly king, but to the very king of kings.

And if we take the latter of those two possibilities, we are then being taken back to Exodus 2, reminded of how Moses had wanted to be a deliverer for his people.

That led him to kill one of the Egyptian taskmasters. That became known to Pharaoh. Moses had to leave. He didn't raise a revolt. He didn't start an insurrection. Rather, he went into a kind of self-imposed exile for forty years.

Here he was, called to be the deliverer of his people. This was his destiny. But instead, he spends forty years in the desert. One writer puts it, he spent the first forty years of his life thinking he was a somebody, and the next forty years realizing he was a nobody.

Well, how did he keep on going? How did he press on? How did he endure? Because he had his eyes set on the Lord. Friends, sometimes things in this life do not work out as we hope or plan.

- [24:31] Sometimes in the providence of God, life throws up the unexpected, the unforeseen. There are family problems. There's a bereavement and loss. There are broken relationships, difficulties at work, sickness and health, all manner of anxieties and stresses that seem just to magically appear out of nowhere.

Maybe tonight you're in that very place. How do we keep going at such times? How does faith persevere? How do we press on in the way of faith when the terrain suddenly becomes hard and difficult?

Well, like Moses, we have to set the Lord before us. We have to fix our eyes on him. He must fill our vision. If you can imagine, if you will, an experience from my childhood when the carpet of snow over a field up past our house glistening in the winter sun stretching before me untouched, unmarked by any footprint, mind the privilege of being the first to walk across it, making any pattern I would like.

And I decide I'm going to cut a straight line across the field. But my eyes are looking down at my feet as I cross.

And I soon discover as I look back, I have left not a straight line, but an erratic zigzag pattern behind me.

- [26:20] Because looking downwards, it's easy to become disorientated. But if instead you fix your eye on a tree or a fence post on the far side of the field and walk directly towards it, the path you leave behind is remarkably straight.

because the truth is we all tend to move towards the object upon which we fix our gaze. It matters where our eyes are fixed.

We move towards that which fills our vision. Moses endured because he was seeing the one who was invisible. He kept his eyes on the Lord, the eyes of faith.

And that's what faith does. That's how faith endures. Be thou my vision, we sang, O Lord of my heart, not be all else to me, save that thou art, thou my best thought, by day and by night, waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Are you setting your eyes upon God? I mentioned years ago spending some time in that refugee camp.

- [27:39] on the Thai-Myanmar border. I was greatly struck by the faith of the Karen Christians, a people displaced from their own homeland, in exile, refugees for decades, little chance, humanly speaking, of going back to their own land.

What kept them going? How were they able to persevere? I came across a piece of poetry written by a student at the Bible school.

This is how it went. This is how it goes. They call us a displaced people, but praise God we are not misplaced. They say they see no hope for our future, but praise God our future is as bright as the promises of God.

They say the life of our people is a misery, but praise God our life is a mystery. For what they see, say is what they see, and what they see is temporal, but ours is the eternal.

All because we put ourselves in the hands of God we trust. What were they doing? They're setting their eyes upon the Lord.

[ 29 : 00 ] Like Moses, they endure as seeing Him who is invisible, and if we would endure, then so must we. Faith does not fear worldly power.

Faith chooses to suffer with the people of God. It chooses to bear the reproach of the Messiah. Faith keeps on looking to the Lord.

And fourthly and finally here, verse 28, you'll notice that faith embraces God's word of salvation. By faith He kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

That's referenced here is Exodus 12, the Passover, the great redemptive act of Old Testament history, one that casts its shadow forward to the coming of Christ.

In Egypt, the Lord's people were enslaved. They were a people trapped in all manner of suffering and pain. They were under the rule of Pharaoh. They were in the grip and the power really of the false gods of Egypt.

[ 30 : 11 ] Their enslavement wasn't simply social or economic. It was also spiritual, theological. In their Egyptian captivity, Israel succumbed to idolatry and false worship.

They revert to the worship of the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. Joshua says to the people at Shechem, Joshua 24, 14, throw away the gods your forefathers worship beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord.

So, the people's deliverance and redemption from Egypt came, of course, through judgment. Judgment fell on Pharaoh, the Egyptians, even Israel itself.

Nine successive plagues, and Pharaoh would not relent. He would not let God's people go until the final plague, the most devastating of them all.

All the firstborn children in Egypt would die in a single night. The angel of death, the destroyer, would sweep through the land, bring judgment on every single household. I will bring judgment, Exodus 12, 12, on all the gods of Egypt.

[ 31 : 21 ] I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

The blood there is, of course, the blood of the lamb, sprinkled on the doorposts of the houses. And I suppose it all seems such a complicated arrangement.

Why did God not simply distinguish between the Egyptians and the Israelites on ethnic grounds? Why all this blood? God is omniscient. He hardly needed a red mark on the door to tell an Egyptian household from a Jewish one.

So, what was going on here? I think the answer is this, that this was not a matter of racial discrimination. The Jews were just as guilty as the Egyptians because they too had become idolaters.

Justice demanded that they be punished for they too had sinned against God. And so, God does not issue some cheap blanket decree of pardon.

[ 32 : 29 ] He makes provision for those with faith to believe His word that they might evade the judgment to come. On the morning after the Passover inside every Egyptian household, there was a dead son.

And inside every Jewish home, there was a dead lamb. The conclusion, the lamb died in the place of the son.

The surviving eldest boy from every Jewish family could say, that lamb died for me. It died in my place.

The sprinkled blood, a sign that death had already taken place. It wasn't a marker of Jewishness. It was a marker of a people who had placed their faith in God's word of salvation.

And friends, the threat of God's judgment is as real today as it ever was. Earlier on in this letter, in chapter 9, 26, He has appeared, that is, Jesus has appeared once for all at the end of the ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

[ 33 : 46 ] It's appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment. How can any of us avoid the just judgment of a holy God?

Because we too are idolaters at heart. Friends, the way of escape is the same. We have to trust God's word, place our faith in the blood of a slain lamb.

The lamb is Jesus Christ Himself. Paul tells the Corinthians, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. The lamb has been slain, our redemption paid for in full.

And that's why the message of the cross lies at the heart of Christianity. That's why the Lord's Supper that we celebrate is so important to the life and the health of God's church, because we must never lose sight of the lamb.

Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We must never lose sight of the cross, and we must never lose sight of what Christ has accomplished there in His death.

[ 34 : 57 ] Jesus is the sacrificial lamb of God. He was offered up as a propitiation for our sins. He was given to bear the judgment that was rightfully ours.

He was impaled on the cross of Calvary that God's wrath might pass over us. His blood was shed that we might say with the firstborn of Israel, that lamb died for me.

He died in my place, name, bearing shame and scoffing rude. In my place, condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood.

Hallelujah! What a Savior! I wonder, can you say that this evening? The lamb died for me.

Jesus Christ is my Passover lamb. Jesus Christ has given His very blood for us. We find safety and eternal security in Him.

[ 36 : 09 ] Nothing more is required of us but to trust in God's Word of salvation, to trust the message of the gospel. Whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Like Moses of old, faith embraces God's Word of salvation, embraces the good news of Jesus, and finds safety in the blood of the Lamb.

Here in the Exodus gallery, we have these various portraits of the life of Moses. But they're not to be viewed as pictures hanging in a museum of dead heroes.

Instead, they're a vital call to live by faith now in the living God. Can you hear the words that they speak to us tonight? Do not fear the powers of this world, great though they may be.

Stand with God's people. Bear the reproach of Christ, whatever the cost. Keep looking to the Lord. Admit all the ups and downs of life.

[ 37 : 23 ] And perhaps most importantly of all, embrace the gospel and trust in God's Word of salvation.

Find deliverance in the blood of the Lamb. There's an old hymn. Its opening verse goes like this.

My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine. Now hear me while I pray.  
Take all my guilt away.

O let me from this day be wholly thine. May that be our prayer this evening.

Let's pray together. God, our Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ, our great Savior and King.

[ 38 : 26 ] Lord, may he be truly our treasure this evening. Lord, help us to rejoice in him, to enjoy him.

And may his presence in our lives help us to cast away, to throw off all that would displace you.

Lord, help us to live lives of living faith in you, the living God. As we pray this, in Jesus' name. Amen.