

The Right Choice

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Scripture: Hebrews 11:23 – 12:3

As I thought about what to preach this morning, my mind went back thirty-six years. I was, at that time, about the same age as some of you, young friends. I well remember that sermon as if it was preached yesterday. It was so powerful and so blessed by the Lord, that we remember coming out of church and seeing young people weeping in their cars. I will not preach that minister's sermon. That would not be right to do. But I will certainly try to convey to you some of the lessons we learned from it so many years ago, praying God would truly bless it. And may I ask you to silently pray that this message might have a lasting, an *everlasting* effect on many of us here today!

The text we will be considering is Hebrews 11:24–27, “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”

1. A choice affecting the present
2. A choice affecting the future
3. A choice affecting everything

The history of Moses is not just a nice Bible history that we want to teach our younger children. The writer to the Hebrews places this man of God right in the midst of a gallery of faith-filled saints found in the Old Testament. He puts Moses and the others there as examples for us, people who faced incredible challenges but who, by the grace of God and the faith God gave them, overcame these enormous challenges. In a recent sermon, we heard about some of the challenges you face, especially young people today. Challenges that, in some ways, are like challenges all young people have faced, but in other ways, challenges that are unique to your generation, especially with the digital revolution we are witnessing.

I have chosen a part of Moses's history because in some ways it relates to our times, perhaps more than many Bible histories. Why do I say that? Well, the answer to that is the rest of this sermon.

A Choice Affecting the Present

You know the history of Moses, I trust, or at least a lot of it. As verse 23 alludes, Moses was born in a time when Pharaoh had commanded that all Israelite baby infants should be killed. At first Pharaoh wanted the midwives to kill them at birth, which is eerily prescient of the holocaust of abortion we see today. When that plan failed, Pharaoh wanted the baby boys thrown into the Nile River, which was a god the Egyptians worshipped. It makes us wonder for what gods our fellow-citizens are willing to sacrifice their unborn children. Moses was just such a little Israelite baby, and his parents knew that they would not long be able to hide him from the Egyptians. So Moses's parents did something very daring—really an act of faith. I say that because verse 23 tells us a couple of things that challenge us.

First, it says Moses's parents saw that "he was a proper child." Literally, the word "proper" means "of the town" or "of the city," the idea being, well-bred or even very handsome in a special way. Of course many parents think their little ones are cute and all, but we're sure Scripture isn't talking about Moses being cute. Rather, in some other way his parents saw him as special.

But second, verse 23 surprises us in another way by these words, "and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." And we understand all of this better when we consider that the verse begins with the words, "By *faith* Moses was hid three months of his parents." The faith God gave Moses's parents was stronger than any fear they might have otherwise had, even of Pharaoh's murderous command. It was that faith that enabled them to send Moses down the Nile in a water-proof basket, committing his future to the Lord.

Parents, we need a faith like that, don't we? I know that our natural inclination is to steer our children as long as we can so as to prevent as much sin and danger as possible. But we all come to that point—some sooner and some later—when we need to surrender our son or daughter to the care of the Lord. Oh yes, we prayed for them long before that time, but we had our hand of care, of love, of discipline on them as well. But whether they still live at home or are off to university or away for some kind of work, our hand cannot hold theirs indefinitely, can it? "By faith...his parents"—may those words become precious for us!

The rest, as they say, was history—*God's* history—as are all our histories. Moses was found, pitied, and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. What an environment for an Israelite child to be brought up in! How much could Moses possibly have learned from his mother in the short

time before he was weaned and before he was returned to Pharaoh's daughter? But learn he did—in Pharaoh's court! Stephen, in Acts 7, tells us, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and in deeds." Egypt was the center of learning in that era of history. To this day we marvel when we study, for example, the pyramids. How exact the measurements, how enduring the structures, how they could ever get such massive stones so high up in place, not to mention how they reached the building site so many miles, it is supposed, from where they were quarried!

Young friends, I think it's safe to say Moses had quite a promising future in Egypt. He certainly didn't have to start at the bottom (as they say) but was near the top from his youngest years. The Egyptians wouldn't have taught him all the wisdom Egypt had to offer if they didn't have some grand plan for his life. Look at who his benefactors were! It's quite evident he was a favorite of Pharaoh and certainly of Pharaoh's daughter. And Stephen didn't say Moses was only taught but rather that he was learned, meaning he *had* learned his lessons.

Now just step back a minute, young friends, and take a good look at Moses. He was given a world-class education though not a Christian education. Talk about power and influence! It was not only what he knew, but whom. It sounds like Moses was on the fast-track to power, fame, riches, maybe even a position of leadership. Stephen adds that Moses was well-spoken and powerful in action, a man of deeds. This would be today's equivalent of being the son of Jeff Bezos, founder, chairman, and CEO of Amazon, the richest man in the world. Yes, we could say Moses had a lot going for him, in worldly terms. But I say worldly terms because Pharaoh and the Egyptians were entirely ignorant of the living

God, the God of Israel. At least, they were for now. Instead, they worshipped things—objects that the true God had created.

How about us taking a look at ourselves at this point? What do you see? Are you strong? Are you skilled? Are you good looking? Do you have a decent job or are you doing pretty well in schooling? Maybe you're not the best in school matters but perhaps have gifts in other areas—singing, cooking, a trade. What is the plan, young friend, concerning your future? A nice car or truck? A good-paying job? Marriage perhaps? Anything else? I mean is anything missing from that list?

Verse 24 of our chapter appears to be quite abrupt. “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter? What!? Wasn’t Moses thankful for all the help he had received? After all, Pharaoh’s daughter saved his life, raised him, gave him a first-class education in all worldly skills and learning. For nearly forty years he hobnobbed with a world leader in the court. And would he now just dump it all? And for what?

Thankfully, Stephen fills in some of the blanks for us. We read, again in Acts 7, “And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.” I have to confess, as many times as I read this history, I don’t recall noticing these important words, “it came into his heart.” Does this mean Moses just woke up one day and thought, “I think I’ll go out and visit the people of Israel”? Perhaps he did. But much more likely, “it came into his heart” would be like the words in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, “he came to himself.” In other words, God put this thought in Moses’s heart. How Moses knew the Israelites were his brethren we’re

not sure, but when he did go out to visit them, what he saw was not pretty.

Stephen recounts the history of Moses seeing an Egyptian beating an Israelite and Moses responding by killing the Egyptian and burying him. The next day, when Moses tried to settle a dispute between two Israelites, he learned that what had happened the day before was now public knowledge. Why would Moses try to intervene on both occasions? Stephen explains, “For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.” Already at this time, the thought was put in Moses’s heart that he had to do something to rescue his people. But the problem was he thought to do it his own way. But God had other plans—another way.

If this would be all we knew of the history, we would say Moses tried his best to do what was right, using his influence to rescue his fellow Israelites. Maybe that explains why he walked away from the court of Pharaoh. Maybe he was just fed up with the abuse Egypt heaped on his people. And that same motivation might explain ninety percent of most humanitarian efforts today, trying to bring about social justice. It just seemed like the right thing to do.

Maybe you, young friend, think of yourself as a pretty decent person. Oh, you know you’re not perfect. You know we’re sinners and all. But in the day-to-day scheme of things, do you really think of yourself as a totally-depraved sinner who deserves hell? One who is in desperate need of God’s salvation? Did you ever see yourself in that way? Did God ever put that into your young heart?

You see, there are any number of young people who believe they are saved. I am in no position to judge and

possess no special power to do so. But when you look at Moses, he seemed to have the right motives. He seemed to do what he could to help. After all, he put his own welfare on the line for his people. He thought they would have understood what he was trying to do. And so it is, if the standard of what salvation looks like becomes very low; and when sin isn't all that painful; and when holiness isn't all that radical; and when being a Christian means doing many things non-Christians can also do becomes normal; it's easy to think I'm a Christian. After all, we certainly don't want to be stuffy hyper-Calvinists or legalists, right?

But Moses actually wasn't a philanthropist or a social justice warrior. He became, by God's grace, someone far more radical; and what happened to him was far more life-changing than just good humanitarian sentiments. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Why? "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction...than to enjoy the pleasures of sin." How could anyone choose affliction over pleasure? Only by faith. If we were to make two columns on a piece of paper or spreadsheet, one called "Egypt" and one called "Israel"—to compare them—what would we find? Let's see, in the "Egypt" column we have *power*. Israel? *Weakness*. In the "Egypt" column there's *wealth* and *status*. Israel? *Poverty* and *slavery*. Moses dined in the court of the king. The Israelites had to make bricks without straw. Egyptians held the whip. Israelites were beaten with the whip. Moses was Pharaoh's daughter's adopted son. Israelite boys were drowned. Seems rather lopsided, doesn't it? Not much going for Israel was there? What then really *was* the reason Moses

chose Israel over Egypt? And while we're asking that question, may I ask which choice would you make, young friend?

There are lots and lots of pleasures to be found in the world. I'm sure you know that and maybe tasted a number of them. But then there's that Christian thing, *that way of life*.

To answer the question why Moses would make such a choice is actually quite easy. Scripture tells us. Moses saw things one could not see with just natural eyesight. "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the *people of God*, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of *Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." Moses saw Israel was *God's* people. He saw Christ among them. Let's consider this a moment.

When God works His grace in us we receive new life, and with it, faith. One of the effects of spiritual life and faith is that we see life differently than we did before. That which the world values (and we perhaps valued) doesn't seem to have the same attraction it used to. The things of God that we maybe didn't see much value in before become, over time, more and more real and important and desirable. We no longer pick up our Bibles because we have to or ought to. We pick them up because we feel we need to for spiritual food. We don't go to church because Mom or Dad *say* we have to, or in order to save face among friends, but because we want to worship God. Do these things describe you, young friends? Do things like this live in you?

Faith is the only explanation for Moses's choosing affliction over pleasure. But it's not just affliction he chose; it's affliction with the people of God. By God's grace, he wanted to be one with them, not one with the world. Have you ever become jealous of God's people?

Wanted to be one with them? Moses also didn't just turn away from all pleasure; it was the pleasure of sin that he saw through and rejected. Being a Christian—making the choice of Moses by faith—isn't doing away with pleasure. No, it's pursuing a far greater pleasure. Blind spiritual eyes don't see it that way but the eyes of faith certainly do.

Scripture goes on to say Moses saw even more. He saw Christ. "Esteeming the reproach of *Christ* greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." In ways that may be hard for any of us to fully understand, when Moses looked at this suffering people, he saw the suffering Christ. How can that be? In the same way Jesus said to Saul of Tarsus that when he was persecuting Christians he was persecuting Him, Christ. So can we honestly say that Moses lost everything by his choice? Was his choice made because he was ungrateful to Pharaoh's daughter? No more than a young person like yourself turning away from the worldly lifestyle of an ungodly family you may have grown up in so as to join in with the people of God in their worship of God and their quest for glory. No, the only things Moses lost were death and damnation. And what did he gain? Affliction for the moment, perhaps, but something far, far greater—something everlasting.

A Choice Affecting the Future

"Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." These words might still be a bit hard to swallow. When we hear *reproach* we think of being made fun of, people not wanting to hang out with us anymore, being mocked, ridiculed, even threatened or persecuted. Esteem *that*? How can anyone really value such things? God gives us the explanation we need in verse 26b, "For he had respect unto the recompense of the

reward.” The Greek word translated “had respect” means to turn from all else and fix one’s eyes on something. In other words, Moses was *focused*. Focused on *what*? On the “recompense of the reward.” *Recompense* means compensation, making up for what you lost. *Reward* has the sense of the prize at the end of a race. Putting it together, God is telling us the reason Moses made the choice he did is not because he would immediately benefit from it. No, Moses, with the eyes of faith, was fixed on something else—something beyond the immediate. Moses saw the eternal perspective.

So you get a good job, marry your sweetheart, make money, own a really nice car or two or more, have a nice house, lots of entertainment to keep you busy and keep you laughing, lots of people you call friends who make you feel good. Welcome to Egypt. I’m not saying all these things are necessarily bad or sinful. Not everything about Egypt was sinful, for that matter. But Moses saw the end of a life lived for what Egypt offered. Do you see the end of a life lived for the things of this world or do you see something better? The reward at the end? Glory? Do you know the best of friends? The love of all loves? The safety, security, love, friendship, and assistance that Christ gives? Eternal life vs. life in Egypt? What life are you living right now? Are you sure you’re living for the Lord? Hating sin? Loving Christ?

For Moses there was no middle ground: a little with Israel and a little with Egypt. It couldn’t happen. It didn’t happen. A choice had to be made. The choice natural sight makes is easy—Egypt. The choice faith makes may be accompanied with challenges, but it’s sure—Christ.

A Choice Affecting Everything

Moses, we read in verse 27, *forsook* Egypt. Note the word *forsook*. Yes, he left Egypt but in a sense he left *all* behind. It was “goodbye Egypt.” Moses didn’t look back. He didn’t think twice. The day came and he was gone. Maybe some of you aren’t there yet. When Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress* felt the burden of sin, Evangelist pointed him toward the wicket gate and from there to the cross. When Evangelist asked him if he *saw* the gate, all Christian could say was, “I think I do.” Is that where some of you are this morning? You *think* you see it, but you’re not quite to the point where you’re ready for reproach, for affliction. You so value being accepted, being liked, being affirmed, that you won’t turn from Egypt to embrace Christ?

My wife and I recently came across a hymn we really like. Let me quote from it:

From the love of my own comfort
From the fear of having nothing
From a life of worldly passions
Deliver me, O God!

From the need to be understood
From the need to be accepted
From the fear of being lonely
Deliver me, O God!

From the fear of serving others
From the fear of death or trial
From the fear of humility
Deliver me, O God!

Can you relate to that, young friends? I hope you can. I can! But what is the refrain of this hymn? The chorus?

“And I shall not want, I shall not want, when I taste Your goodness, I shall not want.” *That’s it*, young friend! That’s the difference I’ve been trying to preach about. Love of comfort, fear of having nothing, a life of worldly passions—*Deliver* me, O God, from those! The need to be understood, to be accepted, the fear of being lonely, etc.—*Deliver* me from those too, O God! But then in comes the Lord Himself and we sing, “I shall not want, I shall not want, when I taste Your goodness, I shall not want”—as in, “I shall not lack.”

But after making his choice by faith, we don’t read that Moses was taken to heaven right away. Forty years of training in the wilderness of Midian followed, tending sheep. Not much glory in that, was there? Then another forty years leading an impossibly difficult people out of Egypt and through a waste-howling wilderness. At one point in that wilderness trek, Moses became so low that he literally prayed this, “I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.”

Nobody ever said being a believer was easy. But we are not alone, beloved, not even in the deepest, darkest moments of our Christian life. Listen to these beautiful words at the end of verse 27 in the text, “for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” How could Moses see someone who is invisible? You know how and you know *who* he saw, don’t you? And you can see Him too, young friend. After all, this history was recorded in Hebrews, and the writer included many others who lived and died by faith, some of whom suffered so very much for their faith. Yet these all died in faith because they all lived by faith.

And you? What should you do if you wish to be one of them? “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). How can we do that? “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Why is Jesus such a wonderful Savior? How is it that He understands us? He endured the cross and all that went with it. He knows the shame. But He too, by faith, saw the joy that was set before Him, after the suffering. And without Him—not just at the beginning of our way, but all the way through—there’s no way we can make the right choice and persevere in it. Are there times, like there were with Moses, that we are ready to give up? I have to be honest and say I’ve had many such times. But praise the Lord that He knows that too. When Moses was ready to die, God raised up seventy men from among the elders of Israel and put His Spirit upon them to become helpers for Moses. And to us today who are tempted to give up, Hebrews 12:3 says to us, “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself [i.e. Jesus] lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

When you are struggling, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him. When you feel worthless, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him. When you are lonely, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him. When you look inside and see nothing but sin, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him—for He can cleanse you again, and again, and again. And when you find you’re *not* ready to make the good choice; when you *don’t* see through the eyes of faith; when you *don’t* believe you have

that new life from God; even *then*, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him—for even the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and hearing, will live. There *is* a fountain open for sin and uncleanness, and also for all sinners.

Moses did endure. So did every one whose name is in Hebrews 11. How about you, young friend? Egypt or Christ? Pleasures of sin for a season—a very short season—or life eternal? Is your choice the world? I can still hear that minister thirty-six years ago, to such whose choice is the pleasures of sin, saying something like this: “Then just say it! Just say you want the pleasures of sin and not God! But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” You know and I know and God knows that’s the wrong choice. Don’t do it. Don’t go down that dead-end road. There’s grace enough and to spare for someone like you and me. But there’s only one place to find it—at the foot of Jesus’ cross. Ask Him for it. Ask Him that you might receive sight. Ask Him to cleanse you from the leprosy of sin. Ask Him to open your ears to hear, to raise you up so you can walk in His ways. If need be, ask Him to raise you from the dead—for only He can and will do it. And then *you* make the choice that Moses did and don’t look back. There’s nothing to see behind you. There’s everything to see before you. Looking unto Jesus, you can—and you will—endure to the end. And then—the recompense of the reward of God’s grace! Life, life, eternal life! *Amen.*