

Sermon for Sunday, December 2, 2012
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Moses: Hero of Faith
Hebrews 11:23-29

11:23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the first-born might not touch them. 29 By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

Two hundred forty years ago, leaders from the tiny Caribbean island, St. Croix, decided to send a talented young orphan to America for an education. Alexander Hamilton went on to become one of the greatest men of that generation. Faith in our fellow man is often rewarded. But faith in the Lord is always rewarded, as we see in the life of Moses, a man who lived by faith in God from first to last.

Hebrews teaches us to take Abraham, Moses and David as models of faith. Abraham, the father of Israel, did four things by faith. He obeyed when God called him to leave his safe home; he lived in tents, with God's protection; he had a child in old age and he offered that child to God, all by faith. Hebrews tells us Moses and his family did five things by faith.

- By faith, parents hid him, when Pharaoh ordered Israel's male babies to be slain.
- By faith, when he grew up in Pharaoh's house, he identified with his people, even though they were despised slaves and not the king.
- By faith he left Egypt, leading Israel out of bondage.
- By faith he held the Passover and by faith he crossed the Red Sea.

All this is written for our instruction that we too might live by faith. Let's read his story, and see what God has for us.

1. By faith, Moses' parent's hid him (Hebrews 11:23)

Moses was born four centuries after God's people came to Egypt. God had promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the sand on the seashore and God kept his promise. In recent years the Israelites increased in number until they filled the land. This alarmed a Pharaoh who determined to bring them under control. First he made them his slaves. Then he ordered the death of every male infant.

Trusted to God's providence: When Moses' mother gave birth to a son, she refused the king's edict. For three months they risked their lives by hiding their son. They sensed that Moses was a special child. Translations say he was *beautiful, fine* or *striking*. He was beautiful and his parents took this as "a sign of God's elective favor." Acts 7:20 says he was "beautiful to God." Moses' parents believed God had a purpose for him, so they hid him, not fearing the king's edict. God's purpose for their child was more important than their personal safety. *We should think the same – God's purposes are more important than our safety* (Ex 2:1-2).

To Pharaoh's house: As Moses grew, his parents realized they could hide him no more. So they entrusted him to the Lord, putting him in a basket to float down the Nile. In God's providence, he passed Pharaoh's daughter. When she saw this beautiful child crying, she took pity on him. She realized that he was a Hebrew baby and decided to hire a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. God's providence shone through and Moses' own mother was chosen (Ex 2:3-9).

Moses' own mother fed him, cared for him and taught him. As the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Abraham learned the wisdom of Egypt. He saw the privilege of the king's house. But his mother also taught him about God's covenant, his laws and promises. She told him that he was an Israelite – slaves, yet God's people.

2. By faith, Moses refused Pharaoh's house (Hebrews 11:24-26)

Faith reveals itself by its choices. Moses had a straightforward choice: Would he identify with the Hebrew slaves or their Egyptian masters? The questions entail a yes and a no: to say “yes” to his life as an Israelite is a “no” to his life as a prince of Egypt and to the power, riches and pleasure of a prince that follow. He turned his back on quasi-divine status, on pleasures and treasures.

When he said no to Egypt, he said yes to Israel. The Israelites were poor slaves, subjugated and afflicted. But that's not what Moses saw:

- He chose a covenant with God over a crown in Egypt.
- He chose the one true God over Pharaoh, who called himself divine.
- He chose God's ways over fleeting pleasures that bring ruin to the soul.

“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 – that is, abuse suffered his name [to be] greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (11:24-26).

If Moses had stayed with Pharaoh, he'd have enjoyed decades of wealth and power, Hebrews calls them “the fleeting pleasures of sin.” Pleasure that soon passed. Today if Moses were known at all, it might be as a name on a mummy in a museum. More likely, total historical oblivion.

This teaches us to choose our allegiances carefully. Do you? Do you fall in with a handy crowd? Or do you carefully decide where you belong - with God's people, like Moses. He is a hero of faith because he understood the issues.

For Moses, God's reward counted more than Egypt's treasure. Moses knew riches fly from our hands (Prov 23:5). Kingdoms crumble. As Paul said, "This slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17).

How did Moses know all this? His mother taught him. She told him about God's covenant, his promise to give Israel a land, a blessing, and many descendants. As she told Moses their family story, Moses knew she had acted on her beliefs.

Parents: children listen to our words and watch our actions. They grow hard from our hypocrisy or grow strong by watching our faith in our choices and deeds.

If parents are harsh, if they refuse to forgive a child's sins and never admit their own, children learn that talk about grace is empty. If we're quick to forgive and repent, they learn to live by grace. If we speak well of others, if we celebrate their joys, they learn to speak well. If we're generous to the needy, if we bear the burdens of others, if they see us pray, they know that we believe what we say.

Watch how Moses followed his mother. His mother hid him. Why? Because she didn't fear the king's edict. When Moses led Israel out of Egypt. Why? Because he didn't fear the king's wrath. Friends, choose your fears well. Fear the right things and act on it. Our actions prove our faith and pass it on to others.

Moses chose the life of faith and the right fears, like his mother. The Egyptians probably called him a fool. He believed, with his parents, that God had a purpose for him. But his fellow Israelites didn't agree. The first time he tried to defend an Israelite slave from a violence, Israel scorned his efforts. Pharaoh was angry, so Moses fled to Midian where he lived as a shepherd for forty years (Ex 2:15-20).

Forty years later, the Lord called him "Moses, Moses!" He said, "**Here am I.**" That is, "I'm ready to do your will, Lord." God said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob... I have seen the affliction of my people... I know their sufferings. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh [to] bring forth my people... out of Egypt" (Ex 3:1-10).

God called Moses to protest against Pharaoh and his slave state. Its brutal use of Israel made Egypt the archetype of oppressive power in Scripture. Hebrews says, "He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward" (11:26).

But Moses did more than give up fleeting pleasures; he also took on pain – the reproach he suffered for the sake of Christ. You ask how he knew about Jesus? Answer: The Christ is God's anointed. Moses knew that God had anointed prophets to speak and kings to rule for him. In each case, there was to be a line of the anointed.

Psalm 89 says it's common for God's leaders to be mocked: "Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations, the taunts with which your enemies have mocked, O LORD, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one." So God's anointed are his leaders and they must be prepared for slander, opposition.

Yet all of God's people are anointed in this sense – He sets his Spirit on us, has tasks for us, and wants us to represent him. Sadly we are flawed, imperfect. Only one, Jesus the Messiah, perfectly fulfills God's task.

We, like Moses, should identify with God's people as a whole. So we don't disparage other Christians – Baptists, Lutherans - even if we differ at points. We don't disparage leaders from other branches of the church. Like Moses, we identify with Jesus and his people. Moses "considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures" of this world; so should we (Heb 11:26).

That doesn't mean we court reproach. We should seek and enjoy favor when we can, with integrity. Remember: God made Moses handsome as a sign of his favor. It probably played a role in his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter. The Bible freely points out that a number of heroes were attractive, favored or both – Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel to name just four.

Two of them – Joseph and Daniel used their favor to serve in seats of power, even under godless despotic monarchs. In both cases, they were free to operate with integrity and to save many lives. If you can serve, with favor and freedom, in places of power, do so. But some must resist wicked kings.

That was God's call on Moses. Moses was willing to make the sacrifice. Faith shows itself in our choices. Moses chose to say "I am an Israelite, a child of the covenant, not a child of Pharaoh." He understood that it led to reproach and physical danger. He preferred mistreatment with God's people to ease with the godless. In this Moses is an example.

Moses gave up the treasures of Egypt because he wanted something greater – God's favor. That is why he had no fear of Pharaoh's anger (11:27). Will you pause to ask yourself what you fear? Loss of ease, pleasure, power? Powerful people who can hurt you? Death? Moses feared none of these; he trusted the Lord.

3. By faith, Moses left Egypt (Heb 11:27)

"By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him – kept his eyes on the one who is invisible." Moses actually left Egypt twice. Both times there was reason to fear.

When Moses was forty years old and first identified with Israel, he saw an Egyptian master beating an Israelite slave. Moses – prince of Egypt – struck the man and accidentally killed him. Pharaoh heard what Moses did; more important, he knew why he did it. So Moses fled Egypt and lived in Midian for forty years, before the Lord recalled him.

There was fear in the air the second time Moses left Egypt too. I can't recount the whole story of Moses leading Israel out of Egypt. In essence: When Moses was eighty years old, the Lord sent Moses back to Egypt with a message for Pharaoh: "Let my people go" (5:1, 8:1). But Egypt needed its slaves. Pharaoh wouldn't readily release his Israelite slaves. Therefore God gave Moses signs and wonders, to prove his power, to warn Egypt, and to give a sample of coming judgment if Pharaoh refused.

Now we know that Moses succeeded and Israel went free, but the outcome felt uncertain. Indeed after the tenth plague, the Egyptians urged the Israelites to leave in haste (Ex 12:33). Yet when they left, Pharaoh changed his mind. Dreading the loss of his slaves, he gathered his army and pursued them.

When it says Moses did not fear the king's anger, we can't think he never had a moment of fear. Last week's sermon said Abraham was fundamentally faithful, although he wavered at times. In fact Exodus 2:14 says, that "Moses was afraid" at one moment; it's easy to see why. But fear didn't govern him. Fundamentally, his faith overcame his fear. Not that it's easy! Take a deep breath. Remember who God is, who he is.

Moses "persevered because he saw him who is invisible" (11:27b), as believers do. He saw Pharaoh, but he saw the Lord, although invisible, more clearly. Like Daniel's three friends. They saw the king of Babylon, who threatened to kill them if they refused to bow to his image. But they saw God's protection even more.

John Knox, Scottish Protestant Reformer, had an audience, around 1550 with the Queen of Scotland. She considered killing him for his "heresies." Someone asked how he could be so bold before the queen. He replied "*One does not fear the queen of Scotland when he has been on his knees before the King of*

*Kings.*¹ So Moses marched into Pharaoh's palace and told him, "Let my people go" with no fear of the king's wrath.

This is what the author of Hebrews wanted for his people, as they faced Caesar. And it's what the Lord wants for us, whenever we face a fearful power. Again, pause to name your fear. See how it stacks up. If God is for us, who is against us?

4. By faith, Moses made a Passover (Heb 11:28, Exodus 12)

By faith, Moses made a Passover. God defeated the gods of Egypt. They worshiped Hopi, god of the Nile, so God spoiled its water. They worshiped a frog god, so frogs overran the land. But nothing moved Pharaoh until the last plague and the angel of death. God told them to place the blood of a lamb over their doors. As the angel saw the sign of their faith, he spared them.

That first generation didn't understand the full symbolism. But John tells us that Jesus is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Jesus covers our sins, spares us from eternal death, gives us life with God.

5. By faith, Moses crossed the Sea (Heb 11:29)

Even after the final plague, Pharaoh's hardened his heart one more time. His army pursued Israel and caught up to them as they camped at the edge of the Red Sea. They were trapped and cried out. Moses said, "Fear not. Stand firm. The Lord will fight for you" (Ex 14:13-14). Then God told Moses to lift up his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea. He promised the sea would divide and that Israel would "go through the sea on dry ground" (14:16).

The water parted, the ground dried and hardened, the waves piled up on either side, and the people stepped onto the dry sea bed and began to cross. What faith that took! By faith they escaped. Meanwhile, the Egyptians saw Israel fleeing and tried to pursue them. The original might be translated: made an attempt, gave a try.

You see the difference: Israel crossed by faith, trusting God's care. The Egyptians saw their slaves escaping and said "**Let's try this.**" Greed and violence motivated them and the sea closed over them. But faith and love motivated Israel and they passed through safely.

This moment is one of many ways in which Moses and the exodus point us to the work of Jesus – both in the past and in the future. Here Israel found a way to life. Jesus says that through him we pass over from death to life – John 5. Jesus also said, "I am the way the truth and the life." But Moses and the Exodus point to Jesus in many other ways. They are hints and shadows that prepare us for him.

We are grateful for them, since they let us see more aspects of our Lord and his coming – our focus in this season. In his kindness, Jesus gave us four gospels. We love all four, but sometimes one account of Jesus' life is especially touching. We also have twenty epistles to explain Jesus' life. And we have many types that foreshadow the life of Jesus. They prepare us for it and give a fresh appreciation of it.

¹ Philips 508

Moses points us to Jesus in ten ways

1. Hebrews 3:2 says both Moses and Jesus were faithful; Moses faithful *in* God's house, Jesus faithful *over* God's house.
2. Moses was God's first great prophet; Jesus is the last and greatest prophet The Lord said he would raise up a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15, 18, Acts 7:37). Moses spoke to God face-to-face. Jesus is God; when he speaks, we hear God's voice.
3. Moses delivered God's people from the land of bondage and took them to the borders of the Promised Land. Jesus delivered his people from all bondage. He brought us into his kingdom, so we taste the first fruits of the promised land.
4. Moses defeated an oppressive king. Jesus defeated the prince of demons. Moses was the pioneer, standing up to evil. The Bible says Pharaoh is the prototype of oppressive kings (Rev. 11:8, 13:1). Jesus defeated the leader of all oppressors.
5. After redemption was complete, God gave Moses his law; Moses gave it to Israel. Jesus deepens, explains the law. It also shows our weakness and leads us to Him.
6. Before he delivered Israel, Moses chose to call himself an Israelite. And Jesus calls us his family. He gladly calls us his brothers and sisters.
7. Moses gave Israel rest from slavery, Jesus gives rest from every burden (Heb 3-4).
8. Moses sought to please God and gain His reward. The Father is well-pleased with Jesus, his Son, and he reigns with the Father forever.
9. Moses points to Jesus in other ways. In infancy both had godly parents and both knew their child was unique. An evil monarch threatened both. By God's providence and courageous parents, neither suffered harm. Moses escaped in Egypt, while Jesus escaped to Egypt.
10. Each founded a new covenant. Moses renewed and advanced God's covenant. Jesus established the new covenant that supersedes, completes the old: "I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

May the Lord write his law, his will, his promises on our hearts. May we learn to lay aside what we want - our treasures, our privileges. Moses gave up all the treasures of Egypt. Our society always pushes for "my rights" and "my respect" or dignity. It rubs off on us, doesn't it? We have a hard time giving up our TV show, eating food we don't especially like for supper. O Lord, teach us how to sacrifice as Moses and Jesus did, how to lay aside our privileges for your sake.

Both Moses and Jesus choose to identify with God people. Moses stood with the blessed example of his parents, his mother's teaching. And Jesus stands with us.

Moses learned what to fear - not Pharaoh, not the king's edict, not armies of seas. He feared God and that made him fearless. I pray that blessing for you. Once Jesus showed more than all, by not fearing death even on the cross.

I pray that you will follow Moses and believe in Jesus in this Advent season. May we live without fear, learn from each other's examples and give up our treasures this season all in faith.

Today, we're going straight to the offering as a way to apply the faith and life of Moses and Jesus. Moses gave up the treasures of Egypt; Jesus gave up the treasures of heaven, because each saw something more important – the privilege of being part of God's family, cause and mission. That is why we give our gifts.