

“Moses’ Faith (Part 4)” – Hebrews 11:23-29

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com]

Take a Bible and let’s meet in Hebrews 11...

Last week I started feeling congested and tired toward the end of the week. By the weekend it became pretty clear that you would not have wanted me preaching on Sunday (especially you guys in the front). Just ask my wife, as she ended up missing a few days of work when she got sick too. So...you’re welcome. Fortunately Joe was available on short notice to pinch hit and I know that was a blessing for all of you. I’m thankful for Joe and the ministry he does in Tyler.

Now that I’m back, let’s look again at the story of Moses as told by the writer of Hebrews in chapter 11. We have looked at this Moses section for a few weeks and considered a few lessons related to the nature of Moses’ faith. He possessed a...

Courageous Faith

We Must Recalibrate Our Fear

Compliant Faith

We Must Recall Our Dependence

Conquering Faith

We Must Recognize Our Victory

Now today and next week I want to add a fourth point. Or at least introduce a it. Moses’ faith was also a...

Costly Faith

We Must Recalculate Our Treasure

To see this we need to circle back to a few verses in the middle of the section. To that end, let’s look at the text. Follow along as I read, beginning in verse 24. The most important thing for you to understand is what I am about to read, so listen closely. This is God’s Word...

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.” (Hebrews 11:24-26)

Verses 24 to 26 are sandwiched between what the author says about the deliverance of the infant Moses (11:23) and the departure of Moses from Egypt (11:27). As we’ve seen, the departure of verse 27 could be a reference to his departure to Midian at age 40 after he murdered an Egyptian or his departure to Sinai with the Israelites in tow during the Exodus at age 80. The text is ambiguous, though I probably lean to the former explanation.

The question that confronts us today is what event does the author Hebrews have in mind when he refers to Moses' "*choosing to be mistreated with the people of God*" in verse 25. If it refers to a specific discernable point in Moses' story (instead of a undefined disposition that characterized his adulthood), it is likely a reference to the event that precipitated his initial flight from Egypt—the murder of the Egyptian and the attempted cover-up of that crime. This is how that event is described in Exodus 2...

"One day, when Moses had grown up [cf. Hebrews 11:24, "when he had grown up"], he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people [literally, "brothers"].¹² He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." (Exodus 2:11-12)

The New Testament tells us that Moses was 40 years old at this point (Acts 7:23). Though we don't know exactly how, he seems to have some awareness of his background (even if it's only a fragmented knowledge). The text says he went out to look at "*his people*," meaning the Hebrew people. This knowledge was probably solidified in those years with his biological mother (acting as his wet nurse), before he was returned to the Egyptian princess (his adopting mother) to be raised among the wealthy elites.

In any case, the point is that even at this juncture Moses identifies with "*his people*" in some sense, but I don't think that's what the author of Hebrews has in mind. It's a private and person thing. Moses may see himself as a "Hebrew" when he comes into adulthood, but he is not identifying with them experientially. He's not initially, in the words of Hebrews 11, "*choosing...to be mistreated with the people of God.*" He's not identifying with them in that sense. They are certainly not identifying with him in any sense. He's been living as a prince. They've been laboring as slaves.

But now in Exodus 2 we seem to have come upon a turning point in Moses' life. He sees the people laboring under a heavy burden. Then he witnesses something disturbing—an Egyptian beating one the Hebrew people. So what does Moses do? The text says he looked to see if anyone else was around and then he intervenes and actually strikes the Egyptian down. He killed the man. Then he buried the dead guy in the sand.

Of course, that scene raises a number of questions. For example, was it Moses' intention to kill the man? It doesn't say. Before Moses attacks the man, the text does say that "*he looked this way and that*" to see if anyone was around and then gets involved when he sees that there are no other witnesses. That detail can be read charitably or cynically.

Perhaps, if we give Moses the benefit of the doubt, he was looking around to see if someone else would help the victim and when he realized no one else would, he did.¹ Perhaps his intention was *not* to kill the Egyptian, but inadvertently the force he used was too excessive. Many scholars point out that the word used for the Egyptians "*beating*" of the Hebrew is the same word used when Moses "*struck down*" the Egyptian. He was treating the Egyptian the same way the Egyptian was treating the Hebrew, only in Moses' case "*beating*" rendered him guilty of murder. That act was illegal in Egypt. And, of course, later when Moses delivers the people and conveys God's Law the action is just as reprehensible. Exodus 21:12-13 tells us,

"Whoever strikes [same word] a man so that he dies shall be put to death.¹³ But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee."

That's basically what happened to Moses. So God's Law will distinguish between intentional murder and unintentional manslaughter. Both are wrong, but each was handled differently. So any way you slice it, Moses has committed a crime.

On the other hand, if we read the text more cynically, the looking around before the crime could suggest premeditation. Maybe he was checking to see if there were any witnesses and he concluded that there were not so he acted in vengeance against the Egyptian and delivered the Hebrew. Even if murder was not his intention

in the heat of the moment, let's remember that Moses is a Egyptian Prince whose education and position the Bible tells us made him "*mighty in words and deeds*" (Acts 7:22). Could he not have put some of those words to use in this moment and commanded the Egyptian to stand down? Was force really necessary given his position in the land? Josephus, who was a Jewish historian, claims that Moses was a general in the Egyptian army. If that's the case, then couldn't he have commanded this man to cease and desist (especially if an Egyptian taskmaster was the culprit)? Of course, Josephus doesn't have a reputation for being an accurate historian, so who knows? In any case, his conscience was clearly eaten up by it as seen, for instance, in his cover up attempt, burying the dead man in the sand.

Evidently he thought he got away with it because the next day we find him again looking in on his people and their situation. And, yet again, he witnesses an act of violence. This time it is one Hebrew abusing another. The same Hebrew word is used for the abuse. Once again, Moses steps in to settle the dispute. This time he uses his words. Did he learn from his previous confrontation? Did he view this as a different situation because it involved two of his own people? We're not told. What we do know is that there was clearly a guilty party and to him Moses directs a question: "*Why do you strike your companion?*" (Exodus 2:13)

The answer that comes back was not the answer Moses was hoping for. "*He answered, 'Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?'*" (2:14). Moses has no answer for the guy. It really takes him off guard. Stephen explains, in Acts 7:25, that Moses thought that the Hebrews would have celebrated his previous action against the Egyptian. "*He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.*" So this moment is very counterintuitive for Moses. He's expecting to be celebrated, but he's being called out on the carpet. So Moses panics. He realizes his actions from the previous day are known. Indeed, word of the murder actually comes to the attention of the Pharaoh and the text tells us, "*When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.*" As a result, Moses flees to the land of Midian (Exodus 2:15).

Now when I preached on this story in our Exodus series the sermon was focused on pursuing justice. My point was that pursuing justice is right and good, but how we pursue justice matters. We compared these two confrontations with the confrontation that occurs when Moses arrives in Midian and discussed how there is a right way to pursue justice and a wrong way to pursue justice (you can find that sermon on our website easy enough).

But the writer of Hebrews seems to be reflecting on a different dimension of this story. He sees these events as a turning point in Moses' life. He went from identifying with his people in name only (and apparently anonymously in his circle) to identifying with them in the open. Joining them in their burdens. Intervening on their behalf at great risk to himself. Losing his privileges as a prince of Egypt. Refusing "*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*" (Hebrews 11:24-25). Even if some of the consequences were inadvertent, he still made a choice. He chose to side with the people of God, not Egypt. That choice took faith. And that choice came with a great cost.

That cost is very familiar to Christians around the world and throughout history, even if it seems like a more recent development in our setting. There is a cost to identifying with God's people. It is generally the case that to associate with the Church is to risk mistreatment and forsake the fleeting pleasure of this world. America has been unique, especially here in the Bible Belt, in that for years, even centuries, it was advantageous to be associated with the people of God. If you wanted to be successful in business, you better be able to tell your clients you are a God-fearing man with membership at a local church. It paid to be Christian. It made you a cultural insider because the culture was Christian (at least in name).

But that's changing. It's increasingly less advantageous to be identified with the people of God. And the enticements of the world are increasingly more attractive and less taboo in the eyes of our society. Not surprisingly then, church attendance has dipped in the vast majority of church in our country. More and more

things begin to take a priority. Less and less is our public and frequent association with God and the people of God as important to us. And my guess is that many people in our lives may not even know whether we attend church at all, let alone what church we attend. That would never have been true a generation ago.

What happened? Christ is not seen the same in the culture as He has been in years gone by. The net result, association with the people of God is less of a priority and the thought of “*choosing mistreatment with the people of God*” sounds almost laughable.

Let me ask you something, do you think as the culture continues to drift further and further away from the Lord that it will be easier to associate with the people of God? Of course not! If you fear bringing up Christ and prioritizing His people today, what will happen when “*mistreatment with the people of God*” becomes more and more of the cost for such an association? Most Christians, in most places, at most points in the history of the world have known that there is a cost to being counted among God’s people. Moses came to learn that. Our brothers and sisters around the world learn that almost immediately when they become followers of Jesus. What did they risk when they came to their local church this morning? More than us.

How many conveniences have to align for us to make it on a Sunday? To make God’s people a greater priority than the fleeting enticements of the world around us? How much rest do we need to have had? What sporting events need to not be airing on television? Who needs to be in attendance? Not be in attendance? How many annoyances must we encounter in a members of a church before we decide that the association is not worth it? How many inconveniences must we incur before we start convincing ourselves that we know better than God and that we don’t really need the people of God. We can do it solo, right? Just me and Jesus.

Do you think that theological conclusion has anything to do with the cost of associating with the people of God? We measure the cost of that association on the scales of inconvenience. Moses and most of the world’s Christians measure the cost on the scales of mistreatment. And if all it takes is some inconvenience to convince us that we don’t need to prioritize God’s people, then what do you think we will justify in our minds when inconvenience for our association gives way to mistreatment? If it doesn’t take much for people in our country or city to find an excuse not to gather with or publically associate with their respective churches, then what will become of those same folks when the cost increases. It doesn’t look promising.

Now why did Moses choose to associate with the people of God? That’s what verse 26 answers for us. And the answer has everything to do with why we might choose mistreatment for Christ’s sake in this world. He made a different calculation and adopted different values. We are going to look at that next week. But we also have the advantage of revelation in God’s Word that Moses didn’t have. We have ample reason to see the importance of associating with the people of God and not buying the lie of lone ranger spirituality. And that’s what I want to consider in the rest of our time, since we won’t have time to do justice to verse 26 today.

But this revelation is on the mind of the author of Hebrews. It was him, after all, who stated in the previous chapter,

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”
(Hebrews 10:23-25)

The writer of Hebrews understood the importance of associating with God’s people and he recognized the cost. He saw that many of his contemporaries were drifting away because of that cost and he’s writing to jar them to their senses. “But can’t I just be a Christian without the inconveniences that come with the church, the people of God?” Perhaps you have asked that question before. Perhaps you have known people who have refused to be a part of a local church and yet identify themselves as Christians. The bumper sticker, “I follow Jesus, but I don’t

do church,” captures the sentiment. Maybe you have been such a person. As trendy as this individualism is in our day, there is a certain biblical ignorance that stands behind it.

In a book called, *Why Bother with Church?*, Sam Allberry writes,

“Throughout the Bible, we see that God’s plan is to make a people for himself. This is crucial. God’s purpose is not [merely] to have persons relating to him individually, but a people that, together, are his. God’s promise to Abraham was that he would be the father of ‘a great nation’ (Genesis 12 v 2). The vision of heaven that the apostle John is given right at the end of the Bible is of a ‘great multitude that no one could count’ worshipping God together (Revelation 7 v 9). God has always promised there would be a people for himself. This means that part of God’s work in drawing people to himself is drawing his people to one another. When he saves, he gathers. Individuals who come to Christ are assembled together with one another.”²

Indeed the word for “church” in the New Testament comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is one word made up of two. The first word means “out of” one thing to another and the second meaning “to call.” Therefore, as Trevin Wax explains,

“The word ‘church’ doesn’t refer to a building...it means an assembly, a gathered community. One of the primary functions of a church is that we gather together. It goes to the very core of who we are as a people. We are a called-out people. God has called us out of the kingdom of darkness into His marvelous light.”³

Usually at this point, those trying to be objectionable will interject, “Yeah but we *are* the church and that’s true whether we happen to be at church or not.” On one level this is true. The Bible teaches us about what we call the “church universal,” which refers to all God’s people across the globe that make up *the* Church. This is also sometimes referred to as “church invisible” because there is no way we can see who and how many are a part of it.

Yet before we use one biblical idea to deny the importance of another, namely the importance of the local church, we should remember that “most every reference in the New Testament [to the church] is about the church local”, by which I mean “a group of Christians who are a part of a collective, covenant group, who meet together for worship and ministry.”⁴ The importance of the local church is inescapable when one reads the New Testament and a churchless Christian is an anomaly. So while “every Christian should understand that as believers we *are* the church,” we must also remember “that a key function of a church is to gather in worship and then scatter into our respective vocations for the glory of Christ.”⁵

In other sermons I have made a thoroughly biblical case for why Christians should prioritize the church gathered and why gathering in corporate worship should be a priority. I won’t redo that this morning. So let me just close with a couple reminders, drawn from Sam Allberry,⁶

“You Can’t Come to Christ without Coming to His People”

Moses had to figure that out. Listen to these words that Paul writes to the Galatians to show them how having a relationship with Christ shapes our relationship with each other.

“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Galatians 3:26-29)

What a beautiful picture. As individuals we are united with Jesus through faith. Paul says that we were baptized into Christ and have put on Christ, which means that Christ's perfect record of righteousness has been credited to our account through faith and we are becoming more and more like Him as a result. We are united to Him in these profound ways. But when you, as an individual, are united to Christ, you are also united to every other individual who is united to Christ.

And one of the most beautiful things about that unity is the diversity it springs from. The Gospel creates a kind of community like none other because it brings together people from all sorts of backgrounds, that the world keeps apart. *"There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* That's got to be one of the best verses in the Bible. It's why I love the growing diversity in our church. It doesn't matter where you come from, what side of the political aisle you identify more with, what shade of pigment you carry around in your skin, how much money you have in your bank account, or whatever other distinction the world may use to divide us...in Christ we are one. Brothers. Sisters. Children of God. Family. Seriously. That's not just something we say. That's core to who we are. We must not settle for "loosely affiliated service attenders."⁷ He died to make us brothers and sisters. The world needs to see that unity.

If you are a Christian we have the most important things in common. You and I have the same story (saved from sin and death), the same passion (the glory of Christ), the same struggle (sin), the same hope (the coming Kingdom), the same authority (the Word of God), the same future (eternal life), and so on.⁸ Most importantly we have the same Father, Savior, and indwelling Spirit. And that's thicker than blood. It doesn't do away with our differences. It shows the power of the Gospel to bring us together to the glory of God despite those differences.

We, according to Paul, *"are all one in Christ Jesus."* In other words, we cannot be one with Christ without being one with God's people. In the Gospel, God gives us Himself and He gives us to one another.⁹ But where is that oneness expressed? The local church.

This inextricable link between Christ and His followers was seared into Paul's consciousness from day one, when he first encountered the Lord Jesus. Do you remember the story? Paul was traveling on the road to Damascus to continue his campaign of persecuting the Church when Jesus appeared to him and knocked him to the ground. He hears the voice of Jesus for the first time. *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* This doesn't compute, so Paul asks, *"Who are you, Lord?"* And the voice comes back, *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting"* (Acts 9:4-6).

Now let that sink in. Was Paul persecuting Jesus? Not directly. Not physically. He had never encountered Jesus. As far as he was concerned, he was persecuting the followers of Jesus. But as far as Jesus was concerned, Paul was persecuting Him. To persecute the Church, is to persecute Jesus. *"The relationship between Jesus and his people is so tight that what you do to them, you do to him...Christ utterly identifies with his people."*¹⁰ So what do you reason Jesus thinks about those who bad-mouth the people of God? What a sobering thought! And that thought never left Paul. He dedicated the rest of His life serving the Lord *by* serving the Church. Which reminds us that...

"You Can't Serve Christ without Serving His People"

And it wasn't just Paul who understood that. Jesus said,

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40)

And who are these “*brothers*”? His people. Not people in general. The church. “Again,” Allberry writes,

“how we treat his people is how we treat him. If we serve our (and his!) brothers and sisters, we serve him. The reverse is also true. If we fail to serve his people, we fail to serve him. Neglecting the church is neglecting Jesus. Doing ‘church’ in my bedroom on my own isn’t starting to look so good...”¹¹

Of course, some people are just not able—physically, emotionally, providentially—to be among us. That’s not what we are dealing with here. Those are the exceptions. But most of us don’t qualify for such exceptional circumstances, if we are being real. We just enjoy the fleeting pleasure of the world a bit too much and see the value of God’s people a bit too little.

Time will allow for one more biblical example, drawn from the Apostle John. John understood that “conversion is an individual experience that is intended to become a congregational reality...When you were saved, you were saved into the church.”¹² Let me give you an illustration from one of his epistles. In 1 John we read the following...

“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with...” (1 John 1:5-7a)

What would you expect to come after that? If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with...God? Jesus? The Lord? But that’s not what it says, is it? Look...

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...” (1 John 1:7a)

John is echoing what the other New Testament writers stress, namely, “the thought that fellowship with God and fellowship in the Christian community are intimately related.” And this corporate fellowship is intrinsic to walking in the light. “Only when believers are walking in the light can we have fellowship with God, a fellowship that is embodied as fellowship with one another.”¹³ Or as Thabiti Anyabwile has put it,

“As we reach out to embrace the life of Christ and Christ Himself, we end up embracing others who are also embracing Christ. We enter the faith individually and personally, but we live the faith corporately and publicly. We know the life of God in our own souls personally, but we share that life with everyone else who knows it.”¹⁴

But we won’t live the faith “corporately and publically” unless we embrace the cost, like Moses, “*choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin*” (Hebrews 11:25). To choose Christ is to choose his people. One is perfect. One is not. Both are bound. What grace! Why? Why are they bound? Because Christ has purchased a Bride by His blood. Listen to the rest of that verse from 1 John...

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

What a Savior! Not only has He grafted us into His people, but He has cleansed us of our sin through faith. He lived without sin in our place. He was nailed to a tree in the place of sinners. He rose from the dead so that we might share in the victory of His resurrection. And if we would confess Him as Lord and believe in Him, we would be saved apart from our works. This is the good news He offers us. Salvation. Cleansing. Relationship. Both with God and a people. These are precious truths of the Gospel. And they should be celebrated with the utmost joy, not rationalized away at the first sign of trouble.

Let’s pray...

¹ Bruckner points out that the same language is used in Isaiah 59, but with God as the subject. “*The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him*” (Isaiah 59:15-16). This parallel may support the interpretation. James K. Bruckner, *Exodus* (UBCS; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 32.

² Sam Allberry, *Why Bother with Church?: And Other Questions About Why You Need It and It Needs You* (The Good Book Company, 2016), 27-28.

³ Trevin Wax, *Counterfeit Gospels: Rediscovering the Good News in a World of False Hope* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011), 207-208.

⁴ Jason K. Allen, *Being a Christian: How Jesus Redeems All of Life* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2018), 22.

⁵ Wax, 192.

⁶ Allberry, 29-32.

⁷ J. A. Medders, *Gospel Formed: Living a Grace-Addicted, Truth-Filled, Jesus-Exalting Life* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishers, 2014), 167.

⁸ Erik Raymond, *Chasing Contentment: Trusting God in a Discontented Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 142.

⁹ Medders, 164.

¹⁰ The two headings that follow (in quotations) were drawn from Allberry, 30-31.

¹¹ Allberry, 31.

¹² Allen, 122.

¹³ Karen Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 70.

¹⁴ Thabiti Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church: The Root and Fruit of Spiritual Fellowship* (Christian Focus, 2012), 29.