

The Enabling Power of Seeing God

Hebrews 11:23-29

How is your life different since you believe in God? No, we are so familiar with that question asked that way, let me ask it differently. How would your life be different today if you did not believe in God? I don't mean for you to answer that question in terms of the church activities of your faith. I am thinking about the rest of your life. Do you live the way you do because of God? Or is your life largely the flow of wants and choices that establish spheres of comfort and security all coated with enough Christian vocabulary to make it appear legitimate?

Just think if you could go back to the Hebrew Christians and to these examples of living faith in this book and ask them the same question? Do you think that they would have an answer very different from most of us today? Does it ever strike you how different God-pleasing living looks from the way we live? How would Noah answer that question? How would Abraham and Sarah? Believing in God dramatically changed their lives. Going back was, in their mind, not an option because of the greatness of what was ahead.

Biblical ministry emphasizes the power of God through face to face ministry of the Word to change lives. In our text are little snapshots of crises in which people find themselves needing help. Ungodly authorities demanding sinful actions, the temptations of fleeting pleasures, the hesitancy to move forward in obedience in the face of danger and risk and simple trust in God and the gospel when all is at stake. These are life situations where Christians struggle, sin, suffer and seek for counsel, seek for help and hope.

How do Christians today meet crises in their lives? What do you do in the crucial moments when life changing choices may be being made? When life is just too hard or choices are too unsettling, do we seek the temporary, substitute and sometimes soul destroying offerings of the world?

Our author wants us to see how faith encounters crises. In the life of Moses, we are shown how believing God and treasuring Christ enables us to meet crises. And meeting crises with faith and believing obedience is how Christ is magnified and saints are matured.

Now, I am struck by how each of these crises comes because of Egypt. You could almost title these paragraphs, "The Problem of Egypt." Don't miss this. Egypt in the Bible hugely represents the allurements and entrapments of the world, its values and its promises. The problem of Egypt, of the world, is that it attempts to pour us into its mold, to ensnare us with its power, to entice us with its baubles. And so we need counsel. And we need the kind of counsel that helps people believe God like these people do.

Its Loving Wisdom

(v.23)

The faith of Moses' parents enables them to deal with the sinful commands of evil kings.

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.

In Risk-taking Love

They will not kill him because they see how beautiful children are. They know that they cannot kill the child and their heart is knit in love to the child. So, in utter disregard for the

danger to themselves, they spare him and do not kill him. They are not afraid of the Pharaoh for themselves. They face life and risk death, by faith.

What is being believed and desired here that moves with such poised obedience? First, the child is wanted and desired as a gift from God. The baby stirs his parent's heart so that they will move to hide him. They are motivated by simple human love for a beautiful child. Second, they believe God in such a way that they do not fear what the Pharaoh threatens. Such confidence in God is the fruit of believing in the sovereign governance of God over all. They live in a world where their God is large.

In Reasonable Wisdom

And, they do hide him. Here is where courage and wisdom meet. This is not an expression of a lack of faith, but of faith acting in wisdom. So we may love the lost in Africa and Burma and choose to go there in disregard of the danger to ourselves; but we still give our children vaccinations. We may show love by working in an AIDS clinic, but we still wear surgical gloves, layers of them.

There may be tension between these two; there is no contradiction. Believing God means we will risk ourselves for the sake of love and take all the precautions wisdom calls for in a fallen and sinful world. This is a good and clear word to many who struggle with danger, sometimes real and sometimes imagined. Many Christians all over the world face life like this every day. Yet, they obey God and hope in Him. Some Christians, even in the relative ease of our culture, seem overwhelmed and stricken with anxiety and panic attacks. The contrast is quite simply in what they believe to be true of God. Distorted, diminished, deficient views of God cause anxiety, fear, disobedience and trembling. You cannot live any higher or better than your view of God.

So Moses' parents move in love and wisdom to hide him.

Its Purifying Power

(v.24-26)

I want us to sort-of take a deep breath before we reflect together on this text. More and more, understanding this text has become a focal point for decision making.

²⁴ 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.

The Crises

(v.24)

Our author connects this with his general theme of maturing saints by showing us that it was when Moses grew up that he faced this. From our study of the Old Testament, we know that Moses would have been approaching 40 when these events unfolded.

Moses reached a point where he had to be identified as either an Egyptian because he was the Pharaoh's grandson or as one of God's people. By default, he could just go on living as he had. Everyone knew him as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He had grown up in their house, attended their schools, spoke their language and wore their clothes.

But he came to a point in his life where he had to make a choice.

The Choice**(v.25)**

Moses turned his back on palace and throne to choose to be known as one of the slave people. He turned his back on power, prestige, privilege, position and pleasure to choose to be persecuted and mistreated along with the hated of his society. Now, do you see what kind of choice this was and still can be for us?

The problem for us today is that too many have simply Christianized Egypt. There is no real choice now because the passing pleasures of Egypt are wrongly labeled as Christian. Christians have not turned away from these things but rather are actively pursuing them in their hearts and with their lives.

Make no mistake about this. Sin is pleasurable. Sometimes Christians portray sin in such ways that real people doing real sins simply recognize as false. Sin brings pleasure and satisfaction and delight. Otherwise, there would be no real attraction to it. Choosing to turn away from the pleasures of sin sometimes mean choosing to embrace suffering and ridicule and misunderstanding. It might mean bricks without straws and terrible taskmasters and deadly threats to children. And sometimes it means choices that we simply will not make. Often this choice is the one Jesus points to in regards to money. But it may involve sex, or computers or career or sports or children or just spending or keeping up appearances.

What is the fundamental motivation that drives Moses' (and our) choice?

The Cause**(v.26)**

What would motivate this kind of choice in any one's life? It seems to me that this essential motivation determines which choice we will make.

Moses had done some spiritual accounting. He considered or reckoned that humiliation with Christ was more valuable than the treasures of Egypt. He treasured and valued Christ more than the riches of sin and Egypt. This is a potent verse.

It tells us that men and women and families who choose to pursue the passing pleasures of wealth and privilege and power and materialism and sin do not prize Jesus. Our sophisticated Christianity where simplicity and sacrifice are not valued simply exposes us as esteeming ourselves more than we treasure Christ. What have you ever sacrificed for Jesus? What has loving Jesus and living for Jesus and treasuring Him ever really cost you?

It tells us that men and women and families who love and treasure and trust Jesus value even disgrace for His Name more than comfort and pleasure and ease. This is what motivates people to leave the comfort of home and embrace the danger and difficulty of mission. It is what drives people to simplify and sacrifice for the sake of Christ. It measures our strength and matures our souls and magnifies our Savior.

Where is faith in all this? How does all this simply not become another manifestation of legalism and works?

"He was looking ahead to his reward." He was not gripped by the worth and value of what he was turning away from. He was gazing with delighted desire on a higher and heavenly reward. He treasured Christ. I do not know how clear all this was. It is stupendous that he was driven by treasuring Christ in an age *when there was no Scripture as of yet*. While here we are, surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses and having the full and final Scriptures on our own language and vernacular and we find ourselves besotted with the momentary and the passing.

The ministry of counseling often is dealing with people who have failed to trust and treasure Jesus and now are in the harvest of sinful choices. Some of you are even this week going to face this crisis. You will have choices to make that will show what you treasure. May God cause us to see the reward that awaits us in heaven. May that treasure be God, Himself.

Its Persevering Vision

(v.27)

²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

What we have here appears to be a contradiction. Look at Exodus 2:14-15. In verse 14, he is afraid because what he has done is now public knowledge. In verse 15, there is the attempt on his life by the Pharaoh and he flees. Yet, Hebrews tells us that he left Egypt not fearing Pharaoh's wrath but rather seeing the unseen God. What are we to make of this?

His Circumstance

Understand that this situation is how he chose to be identified with Israel instead of Egypt. He had killed an Egyptian defending his own. He confronted two Israelites who were fighting. But their challenge to him caused him to fear that his killing would become public knowledge. Yet when the Pharaoh moves to punish him, he flees. According to Hebrews, he flees, not in fear but in faith.

I believe that Hebrews is telling us that there is actually something happening between verse 14 and verse 15 of Exodus 2. What is happening there is faith. The situation he has got himself into is causing fear, but faith is why he flees.

His Commitment

How? Because he has committed himself to a course in which he is going to *endure*. What he has chosen in verses 24-26, he will endure. He will endure by faith and flee because beyond the immediacy of the wrath of the Pharaoh is the greatness of the God he loves and treasures.

What was at first fear was turned into faith because of the enabling power of seeing God in his circumstances.

Its Saving Protection

(v.28)

Imagine for a moment that we were told, all over this country, that on a certain evening, a massive cloud of poisonous gas is going to go over our state. All we have to do is to purchase a simple mask, and then wear it on that evening. This is what Israel and Egypt faced.

²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

Sacrificial Requirement

Putting on the masks would be an act of ordinary belief—it is easy to see why masks are required in the presence of gas. But the sacrifice of a lamb and the sprinkling of blood would be an act of God-given faith. The saving protection of a slain lamb comes to those who believe God's warning words and act on it.

Sparing Reason

This verse is full of allusions to the cross. There is blood and wrath and first-borns slain. There is faith and lambs and sprinkled blood. But most of all, there is a hiding place from the wrath of God.

We no longer celebrate Passover, for the paschal lamb has come. We celebrate the cross in the Lord's Table. In the saving work of Christ, I by faith hide myself from the wrath of God against me, a sinner. And though I tremble, I do not fear. For God's firstborn has died in my place.

Now this is stunning. There are times when faith faces a dangerous threat, and motivated by great love, acts with wisdom and hides an infant boy. There are times when faith faces a dangerous threat, and motivated by loving a great God, acts with wisdom and flees the wrath of the King. There are times when faith faces a dangerous threat, and motivated by the provision of God, acts with trembling trust and simply obeys.

These are important lessons for people in the midst of trouble. No matter what the varieties of situations and the character of the danger, faith is the essence and evidence of what we believe and want. We will act driven by our treasures and our trusts. We will need wisdom to act by faith, and not always in the same way.

Its Steadying Victory

(v.29)

It is Moses' faith that is spoken of here. He is the one who comes to God and receives the instructions. He is the one who stretches out the rod. And it is God whose power opens the way in the water on dry land.

²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

An Assured Deliverance

This text communicates none of the desperation of the moment. The sea ahead, the enemy behind. What do we do now? Will we go to God to believe and do what He says. It may not be a parting of the Red Sea or even the Mississippi River, but we will walk through right in the midst of great trouble with calm assurance.

An Absolute Destruction

Just as Egypt plunged after God's people in arrogance and sinful pride and was swept away under the billows of God's powerful wrath, so there will come a day when sin and sinners will be utterly judged. By faith my eyes can see the scenes described in Scripture. And their doom is sure and their damnation is just.

By believing and trusting God, going through the Red Sea was no different than walking home.

Reflect and Respond

How do we meet crises and live lives of believing obedience that shine with the treasuring of Christ?

We will always choose risk-taking love in the face of danger while exercising prudence and wisdom in the midst of a fallen world.

We will choose sacrifice and shame rather than the passing pleasures of sin because we value Christ above riches.

We will choose to endure because we see the invisible and are looking ahead to our reward, God.

We will choose to live by grace, trusting always in the provision of the cross to meet the need of sin and sanctification.

We will choose to believe God in an obeying way so that we have an assured calm even in the midst of enormous difficulty and danger.

A final word of exhortation. Does every choice you have made this past week and past month show how much you treasure and trust Jesus? What about this coming week?