

Lasting Faith

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Preacher: Warren Nettleford

[0 : 00] Today's reading is taken from the book of Hebrews chapter 11 verses 23 to 27 which can be found on page 1212 in the church bibles.

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 as seeing him who is invisible.

Thank you Laura thank you very much. Hello if we haven't met before my name is Warren a member of the church family here at Grace Church Dulwich. Real privilege to be speaking to you all this morning.

[1 : 15] Now before I start I'm just going to lead us all in prayer. Heavenly Father thank you that we have the privilege of being here this morning. Thank you for continuing to speak to us through your words in the Bible.

Thank you that we have the Holy Spirit to guide us in your name. Amen. Amen. Now if you haven't a chance to hear the other sermons in the summer series on Hebrews 11 do try and listen to them on our websites or wherever you get your podcasts from.

And so this time of year is quite important if you're of a certain age. When you analyse internet search queries around now there's a spike with a particular kind of question and it can be summed up like this.

What should I do with my life? What is the best career for the future? Do I need to go to college? Do I need to go to university?

How to pick the best university course? What career fits me? What should I do when I finish university? What job can I do with this degree? How much money do I need to earn?

[2 : 27] How much debt will I be in when I finish? Will university make me happy? Now even if you're not a teenager or a young person maybe you're still asking yourself that question this morning.

It's a joke with friends. I sometimes still do. I'm pleased to say one of my friends is here this morning. Thank you for coming and my friends who are listening too. Now we can group those questions I think can't we into the theme of what we're choosing to live for.

What is it that we're going to do that will take centre stage in all of our lives? Now it's a relatively new question in human history I'd say. Only after the industrial revolution did societies in the west start to consider the idea that the work we did could shape and indeed define our identities.

This morning's passage in Hebrews 11 deals specifically with the concept of what our identities should be as followers of Jesus. Crucially I would say it answers the question who are we living for? And as a result we'll know how we should live. Now we're in Hebrews 11 but also if you could keep your fingers in Exodus 1 that's on page 54 of the Church Bibles 2.

[3 : 47] That would be great as we'll be going back and forth between those two passages. Now in just four verses we'll see three scenes showing how Moses lived and ultimately how Moses' choices foreshadowed the choices that Jesus made for us.

Now when you look down you see heroes of the faith. It's such a striking phrase I think in bold print as a heading for this chapter. But the good thing to know is that those heroes listed here were every bit as flawed and sinful as us.

So I've got three sections this morning to guide us. The first is a faith that resists fear and embraces identity. Secondly a faith that values true wealth. And then finally a faith that sees the invisible and perseveres.

So first of all faith that resists fear and embraces identity. That's in verses 23 and 25. Now I think it's normal to experience fear. Being fearful of uncertainty.

Not knowing how exactly to tackle an obstacle in life. Now I mentioned university earlier on. Making the next step after school, college or university. But it could be in any area of life.

[5 : 01] Well I'd say this small passage gives the example of how fear can be resisted. And instead we should embrace the Lord. To remind you the book of Hebrews was written to early followers of Jesus.

Jewish Christians, the clues in the name of the book. Who at that time were weary and in need of encouragement. Weary of how difficult it was to be a Christian at that time.

Just so you know, it's just 30 years since Jesus died when Hebrews was written. Christians were being persecuted. Although they weren't being killed for their faith at this stage.

That came later. They were being mocked, insulted and publicly shamed. Some had their possessions seized. They were being excluded in society.

Now does that sound familiar to Christians around the world today? If we read the headlines, I'd say it does. Now to tee things up, at the end of chapter 10, we see the writer of Hebrews encouraging Christians who attempted to drift, compromise and give up.

[6 : 07] And so it's interesting here at the beginning of this section that the writer revisits the Old Testament to give an example of where faith begins. The writer goes back to the life of Moses.

Now look down at verse 23. But it's not with Moses where this faith begins. It's with his parents. 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.

Now just for some context, if you flip back to Exodus 1 verse 22 on page 54. To remind you here, the Israelites were in slavery.

Pharaoh feared that the Israelite population was becoming too large, so he gave this command. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, every son that is born to the Hebrews, you should cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.

So as a parent, you were living with the knowledge there was a 50% chance your child could be murdered. And if you didn't allow for this to happen, the consequences for you would be severe.

[7 : 21] Now, the Israelites had been enslaved for around 80 years at this point. Slavery meant forced labor for the Egyptians, often backbreaking work on huge construction projects.

Despite knowing the potential consequences of defying the king, so being beaten, flogged, or worse, Moses' parents hid him for three months.

Reckless? Look again. It says in verse 23, they did it because they were not afraid of the edict of the king. They did not fear the consequences.

I think that's extraordinary. There's no sign of liberation coming. The king can sanction the murder of children. Moses' parents lived with this being an everyday reality.

But they were not frightened. They were fearless. And they did this, if we look down again to the beginning of verse 23, by faith. They trusted in the Lord.

[8 : 27] And I'm sure many of you see the parallels here with Jesus' early beginnings. Mary and Joseph had to hide Jesus when he was a child, when his life was under threat too. But, of course, they went to Egypt.

So before we even got to Moses, we can see the example that his parents displayed. Can we say that their fearlessness had no effect on him?

Now, the decision to hide Moses led to him being taken in by Pharaoh's daughter, in effect adopted into the royal household. So instead of certain death, he went on to live a life of luxury in a royal palace, unthinkable for an Israelite slave.

Let's look again at verse 24. 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.

Now, the picture here, again, paints Moses as a grown-up and is making decisions. Again, back in Exodus 1, despite living in the palace as a royal prince, he chose not to identify with the woman, his adopted mother, in a sense, who he can point to as giving him great status and privilege.

[9 : 50] Ungrateful, maybe, you could say. Now, Moses saw an Egyptian soldier beating and mistreating an Israelite slave.

He intervened and killed the soldier. He hid the body. Pharaoh set out to kill Moses as a result. From that intervention, everything changed for Moses.

He was no longer a prince. He was an outlaw, and an outlaw firmly on the side of the Israelites, who he saw as his own people. Maybe Pharaoh's daughter would think him an ungrateful traitor.

Despite the fact he lived as a prince, it seemed he never forgot that he was also an Israelite. From then, there was a price on his head.

If we look at verse 25, we don't know exactly what the fleeting pleasures of sin that Moses chose to reject by siding with the Israelites, but we know that sin is anything that takes our attention away from the Lord, rejecting his call, living in a way that's uncomfortable for us rather than the Lord's way.

[11 : 04] And so we see in these verses there were two ways for Moses to live. Living in the comfort and security of a royal palace or living as an outlaw and a wandering shepherd. But if we think more deeply, although his choice led to suffering and persecution in the shorter term, it would lead to eventual freedom from the slavery of sin.

Would you give up a palace to inherit a kingdom? Again, there are parallels to Jesus, aren't there? He also chose to be human, to be mistreated.

But what does that mean for us all today? Do friends, work colleagues, neighbours know that we're Christians? Do we live like it? What are we afraid of when making decisions?

Do we choose a more comfortable life, even if we know that we could better serve God when it's harder? Now, I don't exclude myself from any of these questions.

What do we value the most? And this brings me to my second point this morning, a faith that values true wealth. A faith that values true wealth.

[12 : 13] Now, in verse 26, we've got this verse. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking forward to the reward.

So we've seen in the first few verses that choosing the right identity and living without fear when trusting in the Lord are important.

Now, I never thought I'd be saying these words, but bear with me. Last week, I watched a Celine Dion documentary. And it was very good.

It's called I Am Celine Dion. It's on Amazon Prime, if you're really interested. Four stars review for me. It's only 90 minutes. Grab some minstrels. Now, I'm not sure if you know, but Celine, one of the first name terms, now suffers from a debilitating condition called stiff person syndrome.

It's a genetic disease that affects one person in a million. It means her body goes into painful spasms. She can no longer sing as she once did and regularly suffers hugely painful, fitting episodes.

[13 : 25] To see anyone in pain or agony is terrible. But what struck me most of all about her was how much singing in public was totally central to her entire identity.

And without the ability to do that, she sees herself now almost as half a person. In one particularly sad scene, she said this, I think I was very good.

I used to go to the studio and try and give them Celine Dion. She was the best. Later, she went on. When I was in control of what I could do, I could record three songs in one night.

She was the best. Now, of course, this was just a reflective moment and Celine was probably very depressed. But here we have the multi-millionaire, multi-award winner Celine Dion, who sold out stadiums and venues around the world talking about herself as if she no longer existed.

Her identity ended by a disease. The more you watched, the more it became apparent. Her true treasure was the feeling of being able to enrapture an entire crowd with her amazing talent.

[14 : 38] And without that, well, she wasn't worth the same. Now, obviously, being a singer, being an amazing sinner isn't a sin, I repeat, is not a sin. But can even the gifts and talents blind us from seeing who the Lord calls us to be?

Faith has the ability to redefine what we see as being truly valuable. In verse 26, the writer uses a phrase when referring to Moses, I'll say it again, he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.

Now, two things here. How could Moses know about Christ more than a thousand years before his birth? And what does the reproach of Christ actually mean?

Now, if you've been here for the last three weeks, you've got an advantage. You would have heard the sermons on Hebrews 11 by the church family. And we've seen that all the heroes mentioned were, in essence, looking beyond their own lifetimes to something greater.

And so, in being faithful to the Lord, he was weaving them into his story. Each one playing his and her part in the overarching story of God, all pointing to Jesus.

[15:50] So, in verse 13, referring to the heroes, we have this. This is before our passage this morning. They all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.

So, it's the same with Moses. He may not have known the name Jesus, but he trusted in the promise of a future deliverer that had been promised in the book of Genesis.

Even if that hadn't been fully revealed to him at that stage, he trusted that the reward lay ahead in the Lord through future redemption. And so, the reproach of Christ, we should see it as the shame and suffering associated with being faithful to the Lord's mission to save us.

His central plan for redemption. Even though it wasn't fully revealed to Moses at this stage, he obeyed anyway. Moses chose a future promise over the riches on offer of living a comfortable life in a palace surrounded by wealth.

It was the opposite of jam today. And that redemptive mission was later fulfilled through Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection.

[17:03] So, in a way, Moses' actions foreshadowed what Jesus did more than a thousand years later. Let's think about our own lives for a minute here.

What are the comforts in life that distract us? Do we see what Jesus has done for us as being the most valuable thing of all in our lives?

What story do we want to be part of? What promises do we want to hold on to? Are we able to fix our eyes and our attention on the promise of Jesus' return, even though we've been waiting for more than 2,000 years?

Now, something interesting for you. I'll have a look at this. It's believed there were around 2,000 years between Genesis and the account of Moses in Exodus. So, similar timelines. If we look ahead now in Hebrews 12, verse 2, we have this verse speaking about Jesus.

And it says, And that brings us to the final section this morning.

[18:23] Faith that sees the invisible and perseveres. Faith that sees the invisible and perseveres. So, verse 27. By faith, he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

The three vignettes we've seen today all begin with the same two words. By faith. As if the Hebrew's writer is writing in a big, bold marker pen what he wants us to focus on.

Having conviction and trusting in the Lord. I think there are four points of interest in this one verse alone. Now, we now understand that because Moses' identity was firmly rooted in reverence to the Lord, it guided the choices that he made.

It meant he left the only country he ever knew, a different people, a slightly different culture. He didn't just leave to go to another royal palace.

Moses went to Midian, that was over the Red Sea and away from Egypt, probably in modern Jordan or Saudi Arabia. He went on to work as a shepherd, the opposite of being in the royal court.

[19:40] We know from this verse that Moses wasn't fearful of his adopted grandfather, the man responsible for his patronage. That man also had the power and authority to end his life.

Pharaoh had even more reason to end his life after Moses killed one of his men. Look at verse 27 again. We see that Moses endured.

Despite his circumstances, he stayed strong and he waited. Waiting when it must have seemed to him that there wasn't a clear plan.

And he waited. And he waited. For 40 years. This sermon aside, what do we endure? What are we waiting for?

I'm not sure about you, but I get frustrated if things don't go my way in just a few hours. And when you're a journalist working to daily deadlines, you become accustomed to quick responses.

[20:49] Are we enduring for the Lord in our own lives? In the same way that the other heroes mentioned in this chapter persevered without ever seeing the prize of eternity in the presence of the Lord, Moses did the same.

Are we persevering in our own Christian lives daily? It's the easiest thing to write down, I think, but probably the hardest thing we can do. Just a word about those heroes, though, now.

I mentioned earlier that they were sinners just like us. Let me just pick out a few at random. Jacob deceived his father and stole his brother's inheritance. Rahab, a prostitute. David committed adultery and arranged for a soldier's murder.

Samson was violent and sexually immoral. I could go on. These heroes aren't role models. Their failures don't give us a pass to do the same as what they did.

But they are guides to show us that God even uses the most flawed people, whatever their circumstances, to carry out his plan to write his narrative on history.

[21 : 56] Moses kept on going, not because the road was easy, but because the reward was sure. He was flawed and sinful like we all are, and still he was able to look forward to what we couldn't see and trust in the Lord because of his faith, like we should.

Without wishing to conduct a poll this morning, I'm confident that many of us here who today are Christians at one point have at least pondered, even fleetingly, why we should continue to follow Jesus who we can't see.

Moses, as our role model, helps us to find the answer. He endured because he had faith in the Lord and the unseen reward.

And that is exactly what Jesus did for us on the cross. So to bring this together, these scenes in Moses' life show that not only was he an example that we can look to, but the writer wants to show us that Moses points us towards Jesus.

Moses had a faith that resisted fear, embraced God-given identity, valued true wealth, and persevered by seeing the invisible. Moses could have stayed in Pharaoh's palace of comfort, security, privilege, but he chose mistreatment alongside God's people because he saw something far greater.

[23 : 35] He looked ahead to the Lord's promise, trusting the reward would be worth the cost. Again, he looked to the inheritance of a kingdom rather than the wealth of a palace.

That choice foreshadowed Jesus. He left the glory of heaven, endured the cross, and now reigns at God's right hand for the joy set before him.

He is not just an example to copy. He is the source, the goal, and the guarantee of our faith. His death and resurrection secure the reward that makes faith's hard choices worth it.

And so, what about us? Where are our eyes fixed on Pharaoh's palace, whatever comforts, control, or security we're tempted to cling to, or on Jesus, on the throne?

Faith will call us to make costly, sometimes counter-cultural choices. The heroes in Hebrews 11 proves that God uses flawed, ordinary people for his purposes.

[24 : 47] The question is, will we run our race with endurance, eyes fixed on the one who has already run ahead and won the prize? We can be more than heroes for more than one day.

Let us pray quickly. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word. Help us to live by it. Help us to apply it to our lives.

Help us to make the choice to live and serve you on a daily basis. Amen.