Moses and the Israelites

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[0:00] So, Hebrews chapter 11. Let me remind you last week of something Aaron said, and that is when people discover that you have Christian faith, they look at you with pity. They say, how could you possibly risk your life on something invisible? There's no evidence for it. They're a bit sad for us. To be a Christian or to have Christian faith is turned a blind eye to reality. It's to turn away from intellect and all those kinds of things.

And Hebrews 11 comes along and says, the opposite is true. It says, faith opens our eyes and adds capacity to what we understand and know. Just as soon as we begin taking God's word seriously. So, just look back at Hebrews 11, 3. By faith, we understand that the universe was created by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of what is visible. In other words, if you take the word of God seriously, it opens up a new intelligence on the universe and on the life of the world to come. And this is a knowledge that we receive from God that's impossible. It's impossible for the smartest person to come upon. The most brilliant person in the world doesn't know the meaning of the world, apart from the word of God. So, faith doesn't limit. It gives a new vision of reality. It opens our eyes so that we can see beyond what's physical into the future as well. And when God opens our eyes, he puts us in the place of choosing. And the choosing, as we saw a little bit with Moses we're going to see this morning, is a calculation that the promises of God are worth more than everything else in our lives. Because the Bible doesn't want us to be trapped in the urgent now. So, the promises of God week by week give us new bearings so that we can make positive choices. And it's through the positive choices of our feeble and failing faith that God brings salvation to the world. So, let's have a look at Moses. We turn over to verses 23 to 26. And the writer shows two examples. Moses' parents, Mr. and Mrs. Mother Moses and Father Moses, who are faced with genuinely fearful circumstances, who make a positive decision to trust God's promises, and through them salvation comes to others. Number one, Moses' parents. Let's look at verse 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. Now, this was a terrifying choice.

Israel was suffering brutally as slaves in Egypt. And the king of Egypt had decreed genocide on every male child born to Jewish mothers. So, this child, Moses, was born under the sentence of death. It was just a foregone conclusion apart from faith in God's promises. And his parents take this extraordinary risk, put their own lives at risk to save the child's life. When it says in that verse, they're not afraid of the king. It doesn't mean they didn't have any fear. It's not their superhuman. They were terrified.

The word means they didn't give in to their fears. And why not? What did they see that Pharaoh couldn't see? What does the verse say? That the child was beautiful. I don't think I've ever met a baby who wasn't beautiful. Every child born is beautiful. Yesterday, we had a picnic to welcome Rhea into the church family. Beautiful. Oh, such a beautiful baby. That's not what it means here. It's by faith they saw here is another human baby born in the image of God. This baby is born out of the promises of God to bless the whole world. And they knew that killing this child would be a great sin against God. And so they made the positive choice to hide the child based on their faith in God. It's as simple as that.

[4:30] And what did God do? Well, Pharaoh's daughter was down by the river, takes Moses, raises him in Pharaoh's house as her own son. So through the act of faith of Moses' mother and father, in terrifying circumstances, God brings life out of death. And through their choice, we know that God then brings deliverance for the people of God in the Old Testament and for us as well. Point one. Point two, let's look at Moses' choice of faith from 24 onwards. Now, you know, if you've read the New Testament, you know that Moses had the best education the world could offer. He

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was raised in the royal house. He was a star pupil. He was mighty in words and actions, which is a very rare combination. Some people are good at words. Some people are good at actions. He had both. He had PhDs in warfare, in sport, in speaking, and in agriculture, I think. Every pleasure and treasure lay before him. And you know, Egypt had military dominance. It had maritime technology. It had mathematical skill and it had makeup.

Both men and women wore makeup in Egypt. And he was at the top of the heap, virtually a member of the royal family. But he makes this very risky choice based on faith alone in very scary circumstances.

And through him, God works salvation for God's people. 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. This is it. Here is the great choice of faith.

He chooses to identify with the people of God and to share their mistreatment rather than having a life of power and luxury. There was nothing to commend the people of God. They had no power. They had no place in Egyptian society. And the people of God were always very complainy. Thank goodness they're not anymore.

And it's easy to understand why they were so mistreated. But he doesn't make this choice so that he can have more success because he sees by faith that God's promises have been given to this people. So just as Jesus came from the glory of heaven to identify with his people, Moses makes this choice to refuse the position of power and privilege and to choose to be part of the people of God. Now, you know that Christian faith has never been popular or fashionable. That people of God, we never look fabulous to those who are outside the faith. And I think it's easy when you're inside the faith to become disappointed and disillusioned with your fellow believers and with each other and with ourselves. And it's only a short step then to start mocking the church as though you're somehow better. And that's particularly true when Christianity becomes an increasing minority.

[7:54] And these were penniless slaves. Here's a question to think about this morning. What would your advice have been to Moses on that day when he was saying, perhaps I should identify with the people of God and their suffering? I would have been tempted to say to Moses, mate, it'd be much easier for you to stay in place. Use your brilliance and your politics and your speech and your action. You're in line to become the next pharaoh, at least the next prime minister. Then you could do some real good. You could make political changes. You could make the lives of your Jewish brothers and sisters better. And you'd have your own pyramid, an untold golden power. It could all be yours. But if you'd chosen that, he would still be buried in Egypt. And he would have never seen the parting of the sea or the pillar of fire or the Ten Commandments or the Promised Land. Because to choose to identify with the people of God always means refusing something. And God doesn't always call on us to refuse and give up every privilege. But he does call on us to lay down the possibility of every privilege. You know, I think one of the loveliest things about Hebrews 11 is that it gives us God's point of view of human life. And it draws us away from the weakness and failings of these believers to the amazing way God worked through their faith. I mean, last week when we talked about

Abraham and Sarah, you remember how Abraham and Sarah in their life, they wobbled badly in their faith. And even though it says here that Moses chose to be mistreated with the people of God, when he took that action, as we heard in a children's focus, he made a complete hash of it. He walks out of the palace one day, he comes across an Egyptian slave master, abusing and beating a Jewish slave, and he takes things into his own hands. He says, I'm going to fix this my way. I'm going to deliver my people now. He looks around to see no one's watching. He kills the guy because he's mighty in action. And then he buries him in the sand so no one can find it. And in doing that, he becomes a little pharaoh.

And when the king hears about it, he puts a death warrant out on him, and Moses becomes a fugitive, and God says, out of Egypt. You've got to go out of Egypt for 40 years. I'm going to teach you to shepherd sheep for 40 years, so that before you can shepherd my people, and so you can shepherd your own anger and not fly off the handle and do things your way. It's a 40-year lesson. God doesn't appear to him for another 40 years than he does in the bush. Some of us are in 40-year lessons.

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And then God sends him back to save his people. Here's the lovely thing. There's no reference to his failure in the chapter. There's this divine covering and forgetfulness of his sin, because the writer wants to show the power and kindness of God to all who walk by faith.
This is so encouraging to any of us who are weak and full of mistakes and failures. God is looking for us to trust him. And on that day, on that great day of judgment, when the books are all opened, it's not going to be a list of our failures and successes. What's going to be revealed is whether we trusted him or not. That's the big thing. And why did Moses make this choice?
[11:31] What enabled him to see to make this choice? Verse 26, he considered the reproach of Christ, greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Not that Moses had some special vision of Jesus.

He's talking about the people of God. The reproach for the people of God is the same thing as the reproach for Christ. And I think Christ in this verse refers to the people of God who've been anointed with the promises of salvation. So in choosing to identify with the people of God, Moses chose ultimately to identify with his saviour. And of course, the institution of the church has done a great deal, many things that we ought to be ashamed of. But the anointing of salvation that comes through Christ is the one thing that we should never be ashamed of.
So Moses looks at all the pleasure and all the treasure of Egypt, which were real and in his grasp. And he looks at the people of God. And faith opens his mind to see beyond the visible and the present to understand that the promises of God attached to these people are worth more than all the world and 10,000 Egypts could ever offer him. And if we could bring Moses out of heaven now and ask him a couple of questions, and we ask him that question, was that the best choice to make? Wouldn't it have been better to trust your own skills? He would say, yeah, I embraced the reproach of the people of God for a few years, but I came to know God as a friend. And he would say, it was through my weaknesses and failures that God delivered me and delivered my people and opened the sea and gave his law. And even though I lived another 40 years, Egypt has nothing to offer next to the riches of the glory of all that God has for us in Jesus Christ. And I think he may also say, you know, God is always able to achieve far more than we can do naturally.
I think he might say, you can have a nice church with nice programs, nothing to be proud of, because God always calls us to go beyond ourselves, to do things that are completely impossible for us on our own. And he may say also, let me just pause here and say, boys and girls, one minute till I'm finished, and then I'm going to have a look at what you've drawn. He may say, look, the same temptations that you face today are the same temptations we face then. Fear, fear of what others think, pleasures and treasures. And of course God could make everything easy, but I learned in my life that God worked his salvation through those difficulties so that my faith would be genuine and I would trust him. And I don't know, I don't know what you're facing, I don't know the temptations and fears that are upon you, but I know that the Lord Jesus Christ endured the cross and in the cross overwhelmed all our weakness and sin and failure and opened the door for us for glory, for joy. And his joy was that we would join him and be children of the same father. And so chapter 12 says, let us run with endurance the race set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, before the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and it is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Amen.

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