

Matthew 5:17-20

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Preacher: Mike Loosa

[0:01] 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. By faith, he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith, the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith, Rahab, the prostitute, did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. In the fall of 1959, an obscure white journalist, an army veteran from

Dallas, Texas, went to a dermatologist in New Orleans with a request that no one had ever made before. He wanted to change his skin color from white to black. He was deeply troubled by the racial tensions in the American South. He wanted to gain a better understanding of what it was like to be an African American. A magazine agreed to fund his treatment in return for an article. He went through a series of medical treatments to darken his skin. He shaved his head so that his straight hair would not be evident, and for six weeks he traveled by bus and by hitchhiking from New Orleans through Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia. Everywhere he went, he experienced difficulties and insults.

He wrote, an important part of my daily life was spent searching for the basic things that I used to take for granted. A place to eat, somewhere to find a drink of water, a restroom, somewhere to wash my hands. Clerks refused to cash his checks. When he applied for jobs, he was routinely denied. After only a few weeks, he felt defeated and depressed. And so he stopped taking his skin medications, and for a little while he alternated back and forth. He would go to the same places, first appearing to be a black man and later as a white man, noticing how differently he was treated in each case. Eventually, he concluded his experiment after six weeks. Well, the next spring, the magazine published his story, and two years later, he published the book, *Black Like Me*, which immediately became a bestseller. He was featured in *Time Magazine*, on national TV, and the book was made into a movie. It raised awareness, particularly among white Americans, of the reality of racial discrimination and of the growing civil rights movement. John Howard Griffin's six-week experiment had, and continues to have, a wide-ranging impact. But it also had a significant personal cost. In his hometown, he was vilified and threatened. An effigy and a representation of himself painted half black and half white was burned on the main street of his hometown. Out of concern for his family's safety, he moved his family to Mexico and only later returned to Texas. John Howard Griffin's experiment was original, surprising, and controversial. But in some respects, his story reflected an ancient biblical pattern, which we see in our passage in Hebrews this morning. This morning, we're considering the faith of Moses, who identified with God's people when they were oppressed, at a great personal cost. Hebrews 11, which we're looking at this month, gives a number of snapshots or examples of faith in action. This morning's passage is a complete section. It includes seven snapshots, four from the life of Moses and three from those who followed him. And they all begin with the phrase, by faith.

The last two weeks, verses 8 through 22, that section also includes seven examples, four from the life of Abraham and three from those who followed him. And this morning's passage shows us that faith means intentionally identifying with the people of God, whatever the cost. And this intentional identification with God's people has not only a cost, but also a great reward. So first, we'll look at the cost in verses 23 through 27, and then we'll look at the reward in verses 28 through 31. So first, the cost of identifying with God's people. In these verses, we see three key episodes in the life of Moses. First, when he was a baby, in verse 23. Second, when he grew up, in verse 24 through 26. And finally, when he led the people of Israel out of Egypt, in verse 27. And in each case, there is a contrast between a costly identification with God's people and an easy accommodation to an unfaithful world. And the writer of Hebrews connects the challenges that Moses faced with the challenges that the people he was writing to were facing, and the challenges that we might face today. So let's go through these episodes one by one. First, verse 23. When Moses was born, he was hidden for three months by his parents.

[5 : 49] Moses' parents faced a choice. The Pharaoh at that time had made a law that every Hebrew baby boy was to be thrown into the Nile River. And so if they were caught raising a Hebrew baby boy, their own lives could be in danger. And if somehow Moses grew up to be a Hebrew man, he was seemingly destined to a life of cruel slavery under harsh masters. Humanly speaking, the prospects for baby Moses were not very good. But verse 23 says, Moses' parents saw beyond their immediate circumstances. It says, they saw that the child was beautiful. Now, this doesn't mean that they decided to keep him because he was particularly cute or well-behaved. No, they recognized Moses was beautiful because he was created in the image of God. Stephen says in Acts 20, sorry, Acts chapter 7 verse 20, he said, Moses was beautiful in God's sight. In other words, Moses' parents saw their child as God saw him and not as their society defined him. And so they refused to walk the path of easy accommodation to the king's evil decree. They refused to be intimidated by Pharaoh. They walked the path of costly identification with the suffering people of God. They received their child as a gift from the Lord, worthy of being cherished. Now, what might this look like today? What might be a contemporary example? Well, it might mean if you are pregnant, trusting God and persevering despite a prenatal diagnosis of an abnormality.

Or maybe choosing to opt out of genetic testing in the first trimester screen altogether, even if it has become standard medical practice. Because why bother doing a test that won't change how you proceed? Or it could mean seeing the image of God in a child who is not highly valued in the eyes of this world. A child with perhaps a physical disability or behavior problems or a child with a low IQ, making costly sacrifices to care for that child, whether it's your own child or whether it's another child that you mentor or invite into your home. If you're a parent, it does mean loving your child because they're created in God's image, not because they are especially cute and well-behaved.

If you love your child because they are especially cute and well-behaved, you will not love them for very long or very consistently. And you might be inclined to deny and justify and ignore your child's selfishness. You will promote an anxious, insecure child who is always trying to hide their flaws and earn your favor. But God calls us as Christian parents to love our children with steadfast and costly love that is not a response to our children's behavior, but a reflection of the unchanging character of God. So that means we can acknowledge our children's weaknesses and sins without feeling personally threatened by them. That means we will seek to lovingly correct and appropriately discipline them, even when it's inconvenient or awkward. That means we won't stop praying for our children, even if they have walked away from God in their later years or rejected us. Faith means seeing our children as God sees them and loving them with steadfast and costly love, as Moses' parents did.

So when Moses was a baby, his parents made this costly choice to identify with God's people, but despite intimidation from the surrounding world. But when Moses grew up, he faced a different challenge, not simply intimidation from the surrounding world, but alluring attractions of life in the Pharaoh's palace. Moses was born to Hebrew parents, but when his parents could no longer take care of him, he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. He was raised in the king of Egypt's household. He went from the lowest position in society, destined to become a despised slave laborer, to the highest one.

The prince of Egypt. It's sort of like growing up in a housing project in Newhallville or the hill and then being accepted to Yale University. You're still in the same city, but they're two almost completely different worlds. And when Moses grew up, he faced a choice. Which world would he identify with?

[10:44] Would he identify with the suffering people of God or would he identify with the successful leadership of Egypt? Now it would have been much easier for Moses to leave behind the suffering people of God and simply to embrace his identity as an Egyptian prince. Hey, I made it out. I got lucky. I'll take it.

As a prince, he was honored. He was powerful. He was in line to receive a royal inheritance. He had his life made. But it says Moses, when he grew up, made a costly choice to identify with the suffering people of God. Back in Exodus chapter 2 verse 11, it says when Moses had grown up, one day he went out.

He left the palace and he went out to where his own people were and he watched them at their hard labor. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own brothers. And this is a very significant moment in Moses' life story where he chose to leave the comfort and security of the Pharaoh's palace in order to see and choose to identify with the suffering people of God. He recognized them as his brothers.

And so he couldn't simply observe their suffering from a distance, sort of watch it on the evening news, make a token contribution, and move on with his life. He became emotionally, personally, physically invested in seeking their welfare. And so he intervened to reconcile them with one another when they were fighting each other and to advocate for them when they were being mistreated. And in the process, he himself was mistreated, both by Pharaoh and by his own people. Now, especially for those of us who are privileged in this world, do we intentionally identify ourselves with the suffering people of God? Not only with the well-off people of God. You know, many Christian believers throughout the world, here in this city, here in this church are sick or poor or lonely or homeless or persecuted. Jesus said, these are our brothers and sisters. We are brothers and sisters in the same family together. And so if you are only relating to other Christians who are relatively well-off, you are missing out on part of your family.

Jesus said in Luke 14, he said, when you give a dinner party, when you have people over your house for a 4th of July barbecue, he said, don't invite your friends, your relatives, and your rich neighbors.

[13:34] Instead, he said, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And he said, you will be blessed. Now, he wasn't making an absolute prohibition against inviting your friends over for dinner, but he was making a point. He said, when you invite people who are suffering in this world to join, and when you join your lives with theirs, it's worth it. He said, you will be repaid in the resurrection. Moses made a costly choice to be mistreated with God's people rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. And verse 26 says he considered the reproach, which means the stigma or the shame or the humiliation or the mocking, the mocking of Christ, greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. And Egypt had a lot of treasures. You can even go to Egypt and see some of them today.

That's how long they've lasted. Now, you might ask, what does that mean? That Moses considered the reproach of Christ, and he considered it a greater, of greater value than all the treasures in Egypt.

It's an interesting phrase. We might ask, did God give Moses a vision of the future sufferings of Jesus? That's possible. I'm not sure we can be certain of that from this text. But what we can see clearly in this passage is that the suffering of God's people is connected with the suffering of God's anointed one. That's what the word Christ means, God's anointed one. Verse 25 and verse 26 are reinforcing statements that shed light on each other. They're actually parallel clauses in the same sentence in the Greek. And so the reproach of Christ in verse 26 corresponds to being mistreated with the people of God. Now, the point of this is when God's people are mistreated, God himself suffers too.

Psalms 89 uses the same words. Remember, Lord, the reproach of your servants. Your enemies have reproached the footsteps of your anointed one. Psalm 89, 51. So it connects the shame and humiliation and suffering of the people of God with the shame and humiliation and suffering of God's anointed one, who ultimately was Jesus Christ. Or Isaiah 63, 9, another Old Testament passage. In all their distress, it says, he too, the Lord too, was distressed. You see, there is a cost for us when we choose to identify with the suffering people of God. But there was an even greater cost for God when he came to identify with us in Jesus Christ. Moses had to give up his honor, his power, his promised inheritance as a prince of Egypt to identify with God's suffering people. And so he was falsely accused.

He exchanged that for being falsely accused, rejected, ignored, disbelieved, and driven out. You know, Jesus Christ gave up far more than Moses. Because Jesus Christ was the eternal Son of God, the King of glory, who ruled over the whole universe. He lived in a palace that would make the pyramids of Egypt look like a three-year-old's first Lego set. But Jesus chose to identify with us, the Son of God, not only to share in our humanity and in our suffering, but even more to bear our sin.

[17:10] Jesus exchanged his glory for being condemned by the world, rejected by his own people, abandoned by his disciples, and finally driven out to bear our sin all alone on the cross. Jesus Christ made a far more costly choice than Moses made, or even than any of us could ever make, to lay aside his privileges in order to identify with us. And he did so because of the great joy that was set before him, the joy of calling us his own, the joy of welcoming us into his family, the joy of saying, you are my brother, you are my sister, and I have redeemed you and called you by name. I have rescued you from darkness and brought you into my marvelous light. That's why he did it. For the joy of including us in his family, as his brothers and sisters, and so that we might share in his honor, and in his glory, and in his eternal inheritance, Jesus is the one even greater than Moses. So when Moses was a baby, his parents made a costly choice to identify with God's people despite intimidation. When Moses grew up, he made a costly choice to identify with God's people despite the attractions, the allurements of the world. And then verse 27, the third episode in Moses' life, when we see that Moses carried on the courageous legacy of his parents. By faith, verse 27 says, he left Egypt once and for all, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. As we've looked through this chapter, chapter 11, we've seen that faith enables us to see reality as God defines it. And just as Moses' parents saw their child as beautiful and did not fear the king's edict, it says Moses saw the invisible God and did not fear the king's anger. When Moses led the people out of

Egypt, at first Pharaoh wanted them to go. He said, get out of here. But then Pharaoh came charging after them, pursuing them with his armies to destroy them or bring them back to Egypt. And so Exodus 14, it says, when Pharaoh drew near with his armies, all the people of Israel feared greatly. And they cried out to Moses, what have you done? Why have you brought us out of Egypt? We're going to die.

Let's just go back and serve the Egyptians. Wouldn't that be so much easier? And Moses stood and he said to the people, he said, fear not. Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord. He said, the Lord will fight for you. You have only to be still. You see, in each of these three cases, the people faced a choice. And the better choice, the faithful choice, was always the harder choice. For Moses' parents choosing to care for their baby in hiding rather than give in to the king and fear. For grown-up Moses choosing to be mistreated with God's people rather than to enjoy the treasures in Pharaoh's palace. For Moses, the leader, choosing to endure, trusting the God who he could not see with his eyes instead of caving in to very visible and tangible opposition. You see, faith always demonstrates itself in concrete action. If you notice, almost every description of faith in this chapter is an action.

It's an action that wouldn't make any sense apart from the belief, the trust in God. Leaving Egypt. Verse 28, sprinkling the blood. Verse 29, crossing the sea. Verse 30, encircling the city.

Verse 31, welcoming the spies. The point of this is faith is not primarily a private, internal feeling that no one else can ever see or understand. So, you know, don't get overly hung up on how you're feeling from one day to the next. Having faith does not mean that you will never feel anxious or never feel fearful or never feel depressed or overwhelmed. But faith does display itself in concrete, physical actions. Many times, in spite of what we feel, faith displays itself in actions that only make sense if the one that we believe in is trustworthy and true. Now, when Moses led the people out of Egypt and they came to the Red Sea, it said, the people feared greatly. There will be moments, even seasons, in the journey of faith when the people around you or your flesh inside you will fear greatly. And like the

[22:04] Israelites, you will be tempted to go back to Egypt. Maybe the person who first led you to faith in Christ has fallen away and renounced their faith. Maybe you're battling a habitual sin, an addictive pattern inherited from your pre-Christian life. Maybe you've longed to be free from the temptation, from the cycle. But some days it comes after you with a vengeance, like Pharaoh and his armies. And it says, look ahead at your future. There's the Red Sea. There's no way that God can get you through that. Your future is hopeless. And look around you. You're in the middle of the desert. Don't you wish you could go back to Egypt, where you could see beautiful pyramids at least, and enjoy wonderful crops and a whole array of nice restaurants? Don't you wish you could go back to the pleasures of your sin when you didn't feel guilty about them? Don't you feel all alone? Why do you keep fighting the battle?

It's not worth it. It's a combination of intimidation and alluring attractions coming at you at the same time. But if that is where you are, stand up like Moses and say to the people around you, say to your own soul, say to the tempter and accuser and deceiver, by faith I have left Egypt and I am not going back. Because by God's grace I belong to King Jesus. And I don't belong to the accuser and the tempter and the deceiver anymore. King Jesus has rescued me from the kingdom of darkness and brought me into the kingdom of light, into the family of God. I am on my way to the promised land, to the eternal city of joy and delight. And in the meantime, God will make a way where there seems to be no way. So fear not. Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord. You see, there's a cost to identifying with God's people, of making hard choices. But the reward is even greater. And that's what motivated Moses to endure.

And that's what can motivate us to endure. Verse 26 says he was looking ahead to the reward. And the reward, as we see in verse 28 through 31, is receiving the salvation of God.

You see, the cost is temporary, but the reward is eternal. Verse 28, when Moses kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood of the Lamb on the doors of the houses, the people of Israel were saved. They were saved from destruction. And when the blood of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for us, is applied to us by faith in him, it cleanses us from all sin, once and for all. Jesus said, the new covenant is sealed in my blood, which means it is secure and certain, and it won't be changed. It can never be taken away from you. Verse 29, when the people crossed the Red Sea, the Egyptians who were pursuing them were defeated once and for all.

And in the new covenant, baptism is intended to be that once for all sign that we have died and risen with Jesus. We have passed over from death to life. We have been saved through the waters of judgment and into the glorious future that God has prepared for us. And finally, verse 30 and 31.

[25:42] You see, God's people who entered by faith into the promised land, that the walls, which seemed so secure, fell down. Because on that day there was only one refuge, the Lord himself. Now our passage today begins with Moses, who was called to renounce his privilege and some of the pleasures that he enjoyed in this world for the sake of identifying with the suffering people of God for because of a greater reward to come. But our passage ends with Rahab. Rahab was in almost the exact opposite situation as Moses. Rahab was an outsider. She was a prostitute. The book of Hebrews points that out deliberately. She was a desperate woman living in a city that was destined for destruction. She had no status, no honor, no wealth. She was the last person that anyone would have expected to be saved. But when she heard about the true and living God, she knew. She knew that she had nothing in herself that would make her right before God. But she heard about God's power in saving his people, saving his suffering people, and defeating their enemies. And she said, that's the truth.

I need that. I need that. I want that. And one day the spy showed up at her house. And at a great cost to herself, she welcomed them in. She put her life on the line to save them because she had come to trust in the true and living God. And she said, please, when you come into the land, as God has commanded you, would you save me and my family? I want to join in to the people of God. And by faith, Rahab was not only spared, but she was included in the people of God. She's included even in the genealogy of Jesus Christ himself. I began with the story of a man who, in some respects, made a choice like Moses.

I want to conclude with the story of a woman who was not a prostitute, but in many ways was like Rahab. About 10 years ago, not long after we started the Nightrunners ministry, I met a woman named Olga Olga at the Columbus house. Olga had one of the roughest life stories of anyone I have ever met.

Her parents were killed when she was 14 in a homicide suicide. Her older siblings immediately took off with all the parents' money and left her alone to care for her little brother. The two of them became homeless, living in abandoned buildings, cardboard boxes, on the streets and in the subways of New York City. She earned money from drug running and drug dealing and shady business.

She said, once I sold a car seven times. Each time I told the buyers to pay me and then come back for the car next week. I always took the money and did drugs. She used heroin for 25 years and crack for seven. And finally, it all caught up with her. She lost her home. She lost her kids. Her brothers wanted nothing to do with her. And so she ended up at the Columbus house, depressed, alone, and sick.

[29:00] And she said in her testimony, which she gave later on, she said, so this Monday night, I went to Columbus house. The next day I met the night runners, Rob and Rob. I still don't know who the second Rob was, but she seems to remember two Rob's. She said, I was amazed. These young men were so sincere. I knew that they were from a good family. I asked him, I said to myself, what are they doing here? I wanted to find out what they were about. I broke down and told them I am messed up. They were ready to listen. I trusted the Lord that night with Rob and Rob and came here to church. Over the next several months, God did a marvelous work in Olga's life. Instead of being hopeless and depressed, she was full of joy and peace and gratitude. After 30 years of drug addiction, she was almost completely drug-free for the last four years of her life. It wasn't easy. One night she called her accountability partner, another woman in the church, seven times because the cravings were so strong, but she just kept on talking until she got through it. She got baptized here in this church and became a member of the church and joined a Bible study. She started caring for her kids, pursuing better relationships with her family. She brought her family and friends and people she used to do drugs with to church. She became,

I would call her, a runner for Jesus. She got her own apartment, but she would come back with us to the Columbus house because she loved to tell other people about Jesus and the joy that she had found.

She said, I was always hiding and running away, but I'm grateful to God that I'm out of bondage because Jesus set me free. Maybe you're like Moses and God is calling you to make costly sacrifices, to identify with the suffering people of God and trust that the reward that he has promised you is much greater than what you will lose in this world. And maybe you're like Rahab. You have a shameful, painful, sinful past and not much of a future to hope for in this world. But whoever you are, there is a place in the people of God for you. And there is a calling for you to live by faith, to embrace the cost of identifying with the people of God because the reward in Jesus Christ is so much greater. Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank you for your mercy in sending your Son that we might be called his brothers and sisters, that we might be called your beloved children, that we might be redeemed from our past, that we might have a new identity in you that will last forever, that we might praise your name for your great deliverance.

Lord, we pray that as you endured the cross for the joy set before you, that you would enable us to take up our cross that you have called us to take for the sake of the joy that you have set before us.

[32 : 18] We pray that you would give us the joy of knowing that we are part of your family, that we would gladly leave behind whatever you might call us to leave behind for the sake of knowing you.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. As the music team comes forward, we're going to respond with a song called Gladly Would I Leave Behind Me, a song reflecting the posture of Moses and of Rahab as they walked forward in faith. Let's stand as we sing.