

Hebrews Bible Study Year 2

Lesson 15 Notes / Hebrews 11:23-29

Faith Demonstrated in the Life of Moses

In today's lesson we continue in Hebrews 11, highlighting the faith of various Old Testament saints. Today the discussion moves to Hebrews 11:23-29, a section devoted to the life of the great Israelite leader, Moses. As you may recall, this is not the first time Moses has been mentioned in the book of Hebrews. In chapter 3, the author drew several comparisons between Moses and Jesus, as a way of proving the superiority of the Lord. Yet interestingly, in both chapter 3 and in our verses for today all that is noted about Moses is his faithfulness. His shortcomings are never mentioned; all that is focused on is that his life pointed to Jesus and pleased God.

This should be incredibly encouraging for us as Christians, for a closer look at Moses' life reveals that Moses had many failures-at times he questioned God, doubted His promises, struggled with inadequacy, and complained about his calling (Ex. 2:11-15, 3-4, 5:22-23, Num. 11:11, 20:10-13). In many ways, from a human perspective, his life was not successful, for the people God asked him to lead largely rejected his leadership and caused him tremendous heartache. He was even disciplined by God for his sin and prohibited from entering the Promised Land that he labored so longed to reach. Yet interestingly in the book of Hebrews we see Moses put forward as an example of faithfulness. In Hebrews 11:23-29, we are given some details as to why this is so.

Faith triumphs over fear

In verse 23, we see the author begin to draw attention to Moses's life by first reminding his readers of the unique events surrounding his birth. He writes, **"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict."** Brown, in his brief commentary on Hebrews explains,

“Although Pharaoh had ordered the execution of all male infants, Moses’ parents ignored the king’s edict and were not afraid of the consequences. Motivated initially by purely natural considerations, the physical beauty of their child, they hid the baby in their home, taking a great risk in order to do what they believed to be right. Their fearlessness is given special prominence here. Human fear is an important and recurrent pastoral problem, carefully expounded by our author in the course of his letter.

What is important in this context is that by faith the people of God have overcome their worst fears. For many of these Christians in the Roman Empire their king’s edict would naturally invoke deep fear. One did not need to be a prophet to realize that the days of initial toleration would soon be replaced by fierce hostility. The example of a believing husband and wife who took risks, even over their treasured child, would not be without its special appeal in the first century world.”

The courage that Moses’s parents demonstrated seems to have laid a foundation of faith and reverence toward God that impacted their children in the generations that followed. Moses, Aaron, and Miriam all became important figures in the exodus from Egypt, and each demonstrated faith over fear on various occasions.

Faith chooses to live for the eternal

Moving on with our passage, the author goes on to commend Moses for the faith he demonstrated when he writes in verses 25-27, **“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he persevered, as though seeing Him who is unseen.”**

Here we see some specific choices that Moses made to honor God, and the motivations behind those choices. MacArthur speaking of this says,

“For forty years Moses had been a prince of Egypt, the wealthiest, most cultured, and advanced society of that day. He was therefore highly educated and skilled, as well as being a part of the royal court. (Acts 7:22) His formal education would have included learning to read and write hieroglyphics, hieratic, and probably some Canaanite languages. He had, of course, learned Hebrew from his mother. He could enjoy everything Egypt had to offer. But his training in Egypt never blunted his knowledge of the hope of Israel and the promises of God.

When Moses reached the age of forty, he faced a crucial decision. He had to decide between becoming a full-fledged Egyptian, with absolute loyalty and no reservations, and joining his own people, Israel.

The deciding factor was his faith in God. **“By faith Moses...refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.”** In all those years he had never wavered in his devotion to the Lord. Somehow God also indicated to him that he had been chosen for special service and that from then on, he would be an Israelite first and only. Again, we learn from Steven that Moses knew he had a mission to perform for God and for His people. **“And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him; but they did not understand.” (Acts 7:25)** The people of Israel did not understand his mission, but he did. They were slaves in the land that had once highly honored them because of Joseph. Moses was now in a position similar to Joseph’s, but God had a much different work for him to do. Joseph used Egypt’s power for the good of God’s chosen people. Moses would have to oppose Egypt’s power for the same purpose.

In the world, fame always brings a certain amount of honor. If you are born into the right family or are a successful athlete or entertainer, the world will think of you are great, whether you are or not. If you have a lot of money, regardless of how you got it, the world will hold you in high esteem. If you have degrees behind your name, certain people will think you have arrived. The same is true regarding political power and many other types of human success. Moses had most of these things, but he gave them up.

From the worldly standpoint, he was sacrificing everything for nothing. But from the spiritual standpoint, he was sacrificing nothing for everything. He renounced the world's power, honor, and prestige for the sake of God, and knew that for so doing he would gain immeasurably more than he would lose, **for he was looking for the reward** (vs 26)."

It is fascinating that the author states that the reason Moses was willing to lay aside worldly accolades and comfort was because he **"considered the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt."** As Guthrie writes,

"It is surprising that the abuse (reproach) is said to be for Christ, for this seems like a reading back of Christian conditions into the time of Moses. It is not however, entirely inappropriate for a writer who has many times in this epistle invested the Old Testament allusions with Christian significance to do the same here. He implies that all the sufferings of God's people are in some way linked to the sufferings on behalf of the Messiah, the perfect representative of God. All that Moses suffered was in the cause of God's plan of salvation for his people, culminating in the abuse, which was heaped on Christ himself, of which the writer is acutely conscious throughout the epistle."

Brown takes this thought a bit further, relating it to the original audience Hebrews is addressed to when he writes,

"Most expositors point out that this choice made by Moses became a theme of pastoral urgency in the lives of these first century Jewish Christians. Moses could have remained with a godless people, a nation without the true God, but by faith he came to realize that abuse suffered for the Christ was of greater value eternally than secular considerations. The author is thinking particularly of some of those Christians who many have been in serious danger of abandoning their membership of Christ's community, God's true people, in favor of the physical security and social acceptability of the synagogue. 'Be like Moses' he says. 'Decide by faith for the things which are imperishable.'"

Faith takes God at His Word

Going further with the active faith of Moses, the author writes in verses 28-29, **“By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn would not touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as through dry land, and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drown.”**

Here we are reminded of the remarkable events recorded in Exodus 12-14, with an encouragement to remember the faith of Moses, as well as the faith of the Israelites who followed his lead. In both situations, God had given clear instructions which the Israelites were to follow. They were to trust and obey Him entirely if they were going to escape Egypt unharmed. By faith, Moses led the people in obeying the Lord’s commands, and took God fully at His Word. He trusted in God’s provision and depended on Him for victory. As Brown writes,

“Despite the numerical strength and patriotic leadership given to the Hebrew people, the exodus event could be achieved only by God’s powerful intervention. In one dreadful night the angel of death (the Destroyer) visited the house of every Egyptian family and the first born in each home perished. All the earlier attempts to convince Pharaoh of God’s power seemed but to increase his arrogance. Then the angel swept through the Egyptian territories on his mission of judgement and only those houses whose doorposts and lintel were sprinkled with blood were unharmed. Pharaoh and the Egyptians had consistently refused to obey God’s voice, but that night every Hebrew made sure that the blood of the Passover lamb was seen on the entrance to the house. They brought their united and unqualified obedience to the Lord. The instructions were strange, the demands costly (a lamb without blemish) and the ritual unprecedented, but they did precisely as they were told. In simple faith they kept the Passover. They relied on the God who had spoken to them through His servants.”

The same type of trust in God’s Word was shown at the Red Sea Crossing, where the Israelites, largely inspired by the faith of Moses (Ex. 14) collectively chose to trust God over their fears and entered the Red Sea. As Guthrie writes,

“The thought (in vs 29) now moves away from individual faith to national faith, although the people’s faith was still inspired by the faith of Moses. Clearly, the movement of the

Israelites out of the bondage of Egypt was a cooperative effort. At no time was faith needed more urgently than when the Israelites faced the formidable obstacles of the Red Sea which barred their advance with the Egyptians hot on their rear. The way they crossed as if on dry land, while the Egyptians were drowned, was to become a national saga of God's deliverance. It is now considered to have come about by faith. It is well to remember that corporate faith of this kind is but the sum total of the faith of each individual. Such faith must, however, be set against the subsequent wilderness wanderings. On this the writer has already commented in chapters 3 and 4, and here he contents himself with the more positive aspects of faith."

Conclusion

Clearly, from today's text we see that faith was remarkably demonstrated in the life of Moses. Even from his infancy, God was cultivating faith in Moses' family that would lay the foundation for future trust and obedience toward God. While neither Moser, his parents, nor the Israelites demonstrated perfect faithfulness all the time the author eagerly points out times of victory as a way of encouraging his readers to press on with the Lord. In doing so he teaches his audience that God is worthy to be trusted, and His Word can be depended on. As Macarthur writes,

"Faith takes God at His Word and is victorious. Presumption denies God's Word and is destroyed. The Egyptians persistently hardened their hearts to the Lord and presumed to trust themselves and drowned. The test of faith is trusting God when all we have are His promises. When the waters are piled high all around us and problems and dangers are about to overwhelm us, this is when faith is tested, and when the Lord takes special pleasure in showing us His faithfulness, His love, and His power. When we have nothing but His promise to rely on, His help is the nearest and His presence the dearest to those who believe."

References:

1. ESV Study Bible
2. The Macarthur New Testament Commentary

3. The Message of Hebrews Raymond Brown
4. Hebrews Tyndale New Testament Commentary Donald Guthrie
5. The Hollman Bible Handbook
6. Nelson's Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible