

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. ²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. (Hebrews 11:24-28)

Faith Takes Bold Stands

Have you ever done anything bold? What would that be? I suppose it would depend on the circumstances. The boldest single action I can think of took place in China in 1989. In Beijing, there's a place called Tiananmen Square and students led a series of protests against the government there. On June 4th, the government sent in the army to crush those protests. At least a couple of hundred people were killed. Some people think the death toll was in the thousands. Well, the next day as a line of tanks was rolling down the street, and a man stepped out in front of them. The tanks stopped. The driver of the lead tank tried to maneuver around him but he kept moving in front of it. This incident was captured on film and broadcast to the world, although to this day, no one in the West knows who he was or what happened to him.

Do you remember that video? Have you young people seen it? Look it up on YouTube some time. It was a pretty bold move. As much as I'd like to think he went home to his family that night, I doubt that's what really happened. But that's what made it so bold – the potential consequences were very real. Today, the book of Hebrews talks about a bold believer, a man who took serious risks to follow his Lord. We know his name: Moses. He shows us that **faith takes bold stands**.

I.

Most of us probably are familiar with the basic outline of Moses' life's story. When he was born, the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. But they were multiplying far more rapidly than the Egyptians. Their rulers were getting worried, so they began a program of enforced abortion. In the ancient world, abortion usually took place right after birth. The child was killed. The Egyptians tried to get the midwives to kill the Israelite baby boys as they were born. But the women refused to do that. So the Egyptians stepped in and did it themselves. That effort was at its height when Moses was born so his parents hid him. When he got too big and too noisy to hide, they did something desperate. They made a boat out of a basket and set him adrift on the Nile River, near the place where Pharaoh's daughter bathed. She discovered the baby and adopted it.

Moses grew up as a part of the royal family of Egypt. He probably couldn't have inherited the throne, but he could've had all the wealth of Egypt at his disposal. He could've partied and enjoyed himself for as long as he lived. But that's not what he did. Somehow, Moses came to faith in the true God. Most likely, it was through his mother. Moses' sister was watching when Pharaoh's daughter found the baby, and she brought his own mother to nurse him for the princess. Who knows how much contact Moses had with his parents as he grew up? In any event, as an adult he knew the Lord.

God was preparing him to be the leader of his people. But to fulfill that role, Moses had to confess the true God in the face of the certain opposition of the Egyptian rulers. Now, the story took several twists and turns before Moses finally led his people out of Egypt many years later. But our reading for today tells us, **“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.”**

Hebrews 11 is the great faith chapter. It defines faith for us – being certain of what we don't see. Faith is trusting God even when all the world laughs at us and all the evidence we see contradicts what God promises. Then the chapter gives a long list of people who lived by faith. Again and again, they did things. Their faith changed their lives. Moses rejected the wealth of Egypt and chose to be mistreated with a bunch of slaves because he trusted God. The chapter goes on, **“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”** This is the key verse. Moses was looking forward to heaven.

Now, he wasn't there yet. He couldn't see it any better than we can. But he understood how wonderful it will be to stand in the presence of God. And he also understood that faith must confess. In this world, it must suffer. Jesus said that we are blessed when all people hate us because of him. True faith that really points to Jesus must be ridiculed and rejected in this sinful world. That very rejection is a sign that we don't belong to this world. We belong to God.

My friends, the point is obvious, isn't it? We are looking forward to heaven. God gives us a simple promise in Christ: your sins are forgiven and you will live with him when you die. You will rise when he returns and live with him for all eternity in a perfect world. You've all heard me say those things again and again. But faith isn't just something we say when we're in here. We don't just nod our heads when we're safe in church and then go back to our jobs and our neighbors and our friendships and family and fly under the radar. Real faith in Christ must confess. And it must suffer disgrace for Jesus' name here in this life.

Are we ready to do that? In my ministry, I've known Christians whose families made being members of our church very difficult. I've seen kids, even in our schools, mock other kids for doing the right thing, instead of sinning. I've personally felt the pressure to go along with the people around us. Who wants to be known as that no fun, judgmental Christian who thinks he or she is better than the rest of us? That's the kind of thing people will say if you stand up for the truth and live a life that confesses Jesus. I have not always done a good job of confessing him. Have you? It's a sin when we are not bold. But it's a very easy sin for us to fall into.

Why? Because we still have a sinful nature. That sinner inside us hates living for God, hates being rejected by the fun and the cool people of this world, hates suffering for Jesus. That sinner inside us is all about what we like and what makes us feel good. That sinner and the sins he leads us into should keep us out of heaven. But you know that Jesus died because every one of us was born a sinner. Jesus died because the sinner inside us keeps rebelling against God and keeps seeking sinful pleasure here. Jesus died because too often we're cowards instead of being bold confessors of Christ. His blood washed all that sin away like bleach washing a stain out of a T-shirt. Jesus rose to tell us we are forgiven and we will live with him forever. He keeps telling us, every time we come here, that he loves us and forgives and he will never let us go. He will keep our faith alive in a sinful world.

That faith knows what really matters. It looks forward every day to being free from this world. Every time I sin here, I wish that I were already in heaven where I will never sin again. Every time life hurts, the believer inside us wants to see Jesus because then nothing will hurt anymore. Every sadness and sin here reminds us of the treasure we have there. That faith understands that every time we confess Jesus and people laugh at us or make us pay, God is watching. He will more than repay us in heaven. What he promises us is so much greater than any hurt we can suffer here, it is actually a privilege to suffer disgrace for Jesus. Our Lord actually encourages us to give thanks even for our sufferings because God is using those to perfect our faith and bring us home. Be bold and confess, my friends! **Faith takes bold stands! It treasures disgrace for Christ!**

II.

Most of us will probably never have to stand in front of a line of tanks coming to crush a student demonstration. But in a sinful world it takes real courage to speak the truth in love. People don't want to hear that they're sinners and without Jesus they will certainly go to hell. Most people today believe that everybody deserves to be forgiven. But what would that mean? It would mean that people have earned the right to be forgiven. As long as they try hard and do the best they can, God can't really send people to hell. Most people today say that our relationship with God is far less important than how we treat people so if we're good people, God has to be satisfied with that.

Of course, God says something totally different. He says we're sinners. He says that nothing good lives in us, that is, in our sinful nature. He says that only through the work of the Holy Spirit can we begin to live as he calls us to live. And we only do that because we already know we're going to heaven. That's a really important point. It's one of the things that separates Christianity from all other religions and philosophies. You have to be clear about cause and effect. If you think that God lets good people into heaven, then the cause is us being good. The effect is going to heaven. So that means we try hard to be good people so God will let us in. But the gospel says the opposite. It says that God has already let us in because Jesus paid for our sins. Then God calls us to reflect his love. So the cause of our new lives is not a desire to be good enough to get in. The cause is the fact that God has already given us heaven. We're grateful to him for his tremendous gift. That makes us bold here.

Moses grew bolder as his faith matured. When Pharaoh wanted to keep his slaves in Egypt, Moses confronted him again and again and then he led the people out. When the Egyptian army trapped them by the Red Sea, Moses didn't surrender. He was scared. But he prayed and he trusted in God to rescue them. Of course, you know God did. He opened a road through the sea. On the night before they left, God gave Moses an instruction that must have seemed odd. Every Israelite family was to sacrifice and eat a lamb. They were to paint some of the blood of the lamb on their doorposts so that the Angel of Death would pass over them and not kill their firstborn children. Nothing like that had ever happened before. But Moses trusted God and he led the people to obey. By faith, God rescued the firstborn children of Israel but he slew the firstborn children of Egypt.

By faith, Moses and God's people acted. They were bold. And so are we. Now, we don't always feel bold. Sometimes, we're shaking in our boots. But that doesn't mean we aren't bold. When we are most afraid is the time that clinging to Jesus is the greatest act of faith. Now, it is true that in heaven, when our faith is perfect, we'll never be afraid. It's also true that sin and weakness are what make us afraid here. But it is also true that the believer God puts inside us wages war with that fear. He clings to Jesus when God calls us to be his witnesses. I can tell you personally, every time I have to call someone and have a hard conversation about sin and their choices, my gut twists up and I'm afraid. And every time I need to reach out to a visitor or a prospect, I wrestle with the same feelings. Our faith will never be perfect here. But it is real. And it clings to Jesus. He gives us the strength to do and say what needs to be done and said. Beyond that, faith gives us the strength to order our lives as God commands, in how we parent, in how we live and work and deal with our neighbors. That's his promise. So be bold and speak the words God calls us to say. Be bold and live a life that confesses Christ. **Faith takes bold stands! It takes bold steps in life.**

Last Wednesday, we started another school year. Just like every year, the kids were a little wound up. Some of them were downright anxious about coming to school, about new teachers and new classrooms. Among the younger ones, we had some tears. Some of the parents who are new to our school family clearly were a little nervous, too. You know what? That's not surprising. And it makes coming to our school where our kids hear the gospel every day an act of faith. I pray that every day, God builds those kids up in their faith so that they can give a bold witness to the world, in what they say and in what they do. And I hope and pray that we parents go along with them – that we, too, hear that message and grow in our faith. Real faith works. It makes us bold. So trust in Jesus and be bold. Amen.