

Hebrews 11:23-28 "Seeing What Others Cannot See" **

Main Idea: People who live by faith often do things that others don't understand, and that's because they see things that others don't see. We see four examples of this principle in the life of Moses as presented in Hebrews 11:23-28.

I. Because they saw what others could not see, Moses' parents chose to disobey the king (23).

A. They knew that Moses was a special child.

B. They knew that whatever price they had to pay would be worth it.

1. Fear is a fierce enemy of faith.

2. To live by faith, you must face your fears by believing that God is able to do what He promised.

II. Because he saw what others could not see, Moses chose to live for the future rather than the present (24-26).

A. He valued the people of God over a palace (24).

1. How you view yourself will determine how you live.

2. If you think you belong to this world, then you'll do what the world does.

B. He valued suffering over the pleasures of sin (25).

Lie #1: "The world doesn't have any fun."

Lie #2: "Life is all about working and saving now so you can play later."

Lie #3: "You don't have to work and save. You can have it all now."

Lie #4: "It's too hard to live for God in this world."

C. He valued disgrace for Christ over the treasures of Egypt (26).

1. We ought not view suffering for Christ as merely our duty.

2. We ought to view suffering for Christ as the way to experience maximum joy.

III. Because he saw what others could not see, Moses chose to leave Egypt (27).

A. Moses didn't yield to the fear of man.

B. Moses chose to please a God he could not see rather than a king he could see.

IV. Because he saw what others could not see, Moses chose to get ready for coming judgment (28).

A. Moses believed that God would do what He said He would do.

1. God said He would judge the ungodly.

2. God said He would pass over those under the blood.

B. Moses took action to help others believe God too.

Make It Personal: Am I living like I really believe in a person I cannot see?

Last week I received a testimonial I'd like you to hear. I must warn you. It will challenge your faith. What you're about to hear was written by Shirley Litteral, our dear sister who served as a missionary to PNG for nearly forty years until the Lord took her home to glory two years ago. As most of you know, Shirley spent the last fifteen years of her life with Alzheimers. Here's what she wrote shortly after she was diagnosed with the dreaded, mind-killing disease back in August, 1992:

In this Alzheimer's business it's better not to think ahead. "Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof." For if life held no expectations there would be no disappointments; no bitterness. But there are expectations I can't help but ponder. New ones. Unpleasant ones that come from the Alzheimer's book. Of course I regret the extreme pain coming to my family—I mustn't dwell on it. But for my 'ego' too it is hard—because they will remember who I really was with loving memories (as I do my mother) but those memories will be mixed and tainted with distorted pictures of another person—an impostor not even really a person—who will gradually come in to take over my body. They will reject this memory as being me, but it will remain indelible in their subconscious anyway...and of course that is the only memory of me my grandchildren will ever know. In fact if my body (a good healthy one!) insists on living out its full number of days there can't help but be undesired (but real) resentment for time and money wasted on a person—no, a thing—that only causes them pain. So that is one thing I mustn't dwell on lest my disappointment overwhelm me. The other is that the Alzheimer's book speaks of spiritual confusion and paranoia: That seems 'unfair' (though I know we don't make the rules because we don't even really understand the purpose of the 'game!'). The Lord has given peace and every day I say, "It's OK, Lord. You gave me life and I'm yours. You can do what you like with me and it's OK. But please continue to help me maintain that attitude of submission and peace, with an overall conviction that you love me and will use even this 'for good'."^[1]

That, my friend, is the perspective of a person who is living by faith. And those of us who knew Shirley can testify that by God's grace she did what she wrote about. She submitted her life, even her "top of the grad school" mind, to the Lord, convinced that He would use even Alzheimer's for good and His glory.

What is faith? Here's our working definition... Faith is trusting in the person of God and acting on the promises of God regardless how I feel. As Hebrews 11:1 puts it, faith is being certain of what we cannot see.

Think about it. People who live by faith often do things that others don't understand, and that's because they see that which others do not see. Abel offered a bloody sacrifice because he saw the God that others couldn't see. Enoch walked with the God that others could not see. Noah built an ark because he could see things not yet seen. Abraham left his homeland because he could see a city whose architect and builder is God. Later Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice because with eyes of faith he could see God raising him from the dead. Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all went to their graves convinced the day was coming when God would give His people the promised land.

Yes, people who live by faith do things that others often refuse to do, not because they are inherently better, but simply because they have learned to see that which others do not see. You say, "That's what I want in my life! But how?" Moses can help us.

In the minds of first century Jews, Moses was near the top (if not the top) of the list of the ancients. He received the Law. He gave Israel the Law. He led Israel out of bondage in Egypt and into the promised land. The writer of Hebrews mentions Moses eleven times, more than any other epistle.

In Hebrews 11:23-28, the writer gives us four examples from the life of Moses intended to inspire God's people to live by faith rather than sight. The first example takes us back to his earliest days as a child and involves his mother and father...

I. Because they saw what others could not see, Moses' parents chose to disobey the king (23).

Verse 23 "By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."

As you may remember, the king of Egypt had declared a law, telling the Hebrews, "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile (Exod. 1:22)." How should you respond when the authorities tell you to do something that violates the instructions of the ultimate authority, God Himself? Two God-fearing parents refused. Amram and Jochebed chose *not* to obey the king's edict. Why? Our text says it was because...

A. They knew that Moses was a special child. The NIV says he was "no ordinary child," "a proper child" in the KJV, "an unusual child" in the NLT, "a goodly child" in the ASV, "a beautiful child" in the NKJV and ESV. I think this is saying more than his parents thought he was a cute baby (which nearly every parent believes). In Acts 7:20 Stephen put it this way, "At that time Moses was born, and he was *no ordinary child*." The point seems to be that Moses' parents knew that God's hand was on that child, that God had something special in store to fulfill for His glory and the good of His people through that child.

Philip Hughes explains, "Moses' God-fearing parents were driven by an inner conviction that their child had a role to play within the divine purposes and that it was because they were sustained by this conviction that *they were not afraid of the king's edict*."^[2]

So Moses' parents knew that God had blessed them with a special child. What's more...

B. They knew that whatever price they had to pay would be worth it. Did you realize that there is a time when to *not* disobey an earthly authority would be the *wrong* thing to do? There is. When it is proper, even necessary, to disobey an earthly authority, whether that authority is the government, your parents, your boss, even your church leaders? Peter tells us in his words to the Jerusalem authorities in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men!"

When the Nazi's gave the God-defying order, "Turn over the Jews!" Corrie TenBoom and her family said, "We must obey God rather than man," and took steps to protect the Jews, even though that disobedience resulted in a trip to a concentration camp.

When a parent forbids a 17-year old son to accept Christ as Savior and Lord, that teen should rightfully respond, "But I must obey God rather than man, for God commands me to give allegiance to His Son."

If your boss orders you to engage in dishonest practices in order to increase the company's bottom line, you must resolve to obey God rather than man. To *not* do so would be the wrong thing to do.

Moses' parents took a risk. Their defiance could have cost them their lives, but they knew the risk was worth it. Our text says that "they were not afraid of the king's edict." Please realize that...

1. *Fear is a fierce enemy of faith.* Some people refuse to trust Christ because they're afraid of what others will think, or they're afraid of what they might have to give up, or they're afraid that they will fail in the Christian life. Know this...

2. *To live by faith, you must face your fears by believing that God is able to do what He promised.* What God commands, God enables. Have you noticed how many times we hear Jesus saying, "Fear not" in the Gospel accounts? But He not only gives the command, but also the promise to make the command a reality. "I will be with you to the end," He told His followers (Matt. 28:20).

Beloved, there's something worse than experiencing our fears, and that's refusing to do what God commands us to do, for if we do *that*, we have reason to fear!

This is precisely what the first readers of this letter needed to hear. They, as had Moses' parents and later Moses himself, were struggling with fear because they too were facing a hostile government situation.

Raymond Brown explains, "For many of these Christians in the Roman Empire their king's edict would naturally evoke 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."^[3]

What about you? Have you been fearfully dragging your feet on something you know God wants you to do? I urge you today to face your fears and believe that He is able to do what He promised. Do what Moses' parents did.

God honored those parents. He used their step of faith, not only to preserve their son, but I think also to give him a pattern to follow. As Warren Wiersbe observes, "Though godly parents cannot pass on their faith as they do family traits, they can certainly create an atmosphere of faith at home and be examples to their children. A home should be the first school of faith for a child."^[4]

Here's a second example of what happens when you see what others don't see.

II. Because he saw what others could not see, Moses chose to live for the future rather than the present (24-26).

Verses 24-26 "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. 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."

Here's an important principle. You do what you do because of what you value. Your values determine your choices. If you value popularity over righteousness, you'll laugh at the off-colored jokes in the lunchroom. If you value sports over Scripture, you'll choose the ballgame over the Bible study. If you value a comfortable lifestyle over a consecrated lifestyle, you'll always find a way to get the toys you want but always struggle to give your time and treasures away.

I want you to notice what Moses valued, for what he valued explains why he did what he did. He made three value-based decisions in verses 24-26.

A. He valued the people of God over a palace (24). Verse 24 says that by faith, Moses refused to be known as the daughter of Pharaoh. Because Moses had been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, he was in the fast lane to success. He was wearing golden handcuffs, for belonging to Pharaoh's household was his ticket to a good life, a comfortable life, a popular life, a prestigious life.

But then he walked away from it. The Jewish historian Josephus actually shares a legend that says that when Pharaoh's daughter took the child Moses to the king, Pharaoh put his crown on the boy's head, but little Moses took it off and threw it on the ground!^[5]

That story is highly suspect since our text says Moses made the decision "when he had grown up," literally "having become great." In Acts 7:23 Stephen says that Moses was about forty years old when he walked away from the palace. The point the author is making is that Moses made this decision, not when he was a gullible child, nor a vacillating teenager, but a fully mature adult. He knew precisely what he was doing.^[6]

And what in the world motivated Moses to throw away his trump card? We find the answer in verse 25. He made a choice. He *chose to be mistreated with the people of God*, that is, with the Hebrews, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He chose the people of God over a palace.

There's tremendous implications here for our consideration.

1. *How you view yourself will determine how you live.* If you're thinking, "I'm just an average teenager who wants to be accepted and fit in," then you will. If it's, "I'm a middle class American and I

deserve to enjoy the good life," then that's how you'll live. But if you're thinking, "I'm a follower of Jesus who loved me and gave His life for me, and the least I can do is to give my all for Him," then you will. Quite frankly...

2. *If you think you belong to this world, then you'll do what the world does.* You'll live for what you can see and wonder why in the world anyone would ever leave the palace. But, as John Calvin so rightly assessed, "Anything that we cannot obtain without offending God is to be avoided like deadly poison."^[7]

By the way, Joseph didn't deny himself the palace, did he? When Pharaoh gave him the opportunity to serve as Egypt's prime minister, Joseph accepted it. So why did Joseph accept the position while Moses declined it? Please realize they made their choices for the same reason. They both did what they did because they both saw what others could not see, namely an opportunity God placed before them. Joseph accepted the throne and Moses refused it because they both were seeking the most God-honoring option before them. Neither was motivated by self-seeking purposes. That's not why Joseph lived in the palace. His aim was to serve God's people and that was the place he could best do so. And that's why Moses left the palace, so he could best serve God's people.

My friend, if you are loving the Lord as you ought, you will constantly be looking for ways to identify with and serve His people. Like Moses, you will value the people of God over a palace.

B. He valued suffering over the pleasures of sin (25). As the KJV puts it, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

What did Moses do? Our text says, "He chose to be mistreated along with God's people." The verb "to be mistreated along with" (Greek *sugkakoucheisthai*) literally means "to have bad times with." As Gromacki observes of Moses, "He chose bad times over good times from the human perspective."^[8]

Why in the world would anybody do *that*? Moses did it because he saw what others so often fail to see, and that is that the pleasures of sin are enjoyable, but only "for a short time" ("for a season" KJV).

If we're going to following in Moses' steps, there are some lies we need to confront and remove from our thinking.

Lie #1: "The world doesn't have any fun." That's not true. It's a ton of fun to sin. Sin offers an immediate thrill or nobody would do it. Sin is a blast... for awhile. It's kind of like jumping out of an airplane without a parachute—you'll get a rush you'll never forget, and then you'll forget it quickly.

Lie #2: "Life is all about working and saving now so you can play later." That's the American dream, and many are buying it hook, line, and sinker. That life is all about working a job, raising a family, saving your money, so you can slide home in your retirement years and use that free time and all those saved resources *for you*, for your pleasure, for your satisfaction, for your comfort. Life is all about *you*.

But that's a lie. Life isn't all about me. Sure, it's good to save, but not so I can live a self-absorbed life in my retirement years. Where did we ever get the notion that if we live for God for thirty or forty years, we can check out of the church and live for ourselves in the last ten or twenty years? I love being around older people who say NO to that lie, who use the freedom and resources of their retirement years, not to slide home in comfort, but to serve the Lord who gave them all they enjoy for His purposes.

Lie #3: "You don't have to work and save. You can have it all now." That's the lie that's bombarding our younger generation. Live however you want now. Don't deny yourself anything, and if there are consequences someone will bail you out.

Lie #4: "It's too hard to live for God in this world." But that's not true. The truth of the matter is this, as 1 Corinthians 10:13 puts it, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

If you don't know Christ as your Savior, no, you cannot live a God-pleasing life in this world. But if you know Christ, you can. Will it be easy? No. You must do what Moses did. You must learn to say *no* to certain things so you can enjoy the best thing. It's called *self-denial*, but self-denial isn't a choice between happiness and hardship, but between momentary happiness and eternal joy.^[9]

God created us with desires. God created us with desires for joy. The question is, what will bring us greater joy? It's not what the world offers, but what Christ offers. And to experience the eternal joy Christ offers, we must deny ourselves the momentary and fleeting worldly satisfaction of our desires.

Jonathan Edwards explains why self-denial is essential if we want to maximize our joy: "Whoever has tried self-denial can give in his testimony that they never experience greater pleasure and joys than after great acts of self-denial. Self-denial destroys the very root and foundation of sorrow, and is nothing else but the lancing of a grievous and painful sore that effects a cure and brings abundance of health as a recompense for the pain of the operation."^[10]

I've visited many folks in hospitals, but here's something I've *never* seen. I've never seen a person who, while waiting for surgery got engrossed in a television show and said to the nurses at surgery time, "Just cancel my surgery. I don't want to leave this room. I want to enjoy the rest of this movie." Absurd, right? We know that you need to say *no* to some immediate pleasures if we're going to experience greater ultimate pleasures.

That's what Moses did. He chose to suffer with God's people rather than drink up the pleasures of sin for a season, and he did so because he valued suffering with God's people over the pleasures of sin.

C. He valued disgrace for Christ over the treasures of Egypt (26). That's an amazing statement in verse 26. It says that what motivated Moses was *disgrace for the sake of Christ*. Disgrace—insult, reproach (it's what the readers of this letter had experienced according to 10:33). For the sake of Christ—Moses saw his decision to leave Egypt as *for the sake of Christ*. How could that be? Moses lived fourteen centuries before Christ, yet he left the palace and left Egypt for Christ's sake.

There's a connection here. Do you see it? Moses left the palace in order to identify with God's people, the Hebrews. That's verse 25. Now verse 26 says he did it for the sake of Christ. See the connection? For Moses to identify with the Hebrews was to identify with the chosen people through which God promised to send the Messiah, the Christ into the world.

How did Moses even know about Christ? He didn't have a Bible, but he did have some stories his parents had told him, some stories about the promises the Lord God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the promise to bless that family and turn it into a nation, and the promise to bless the world through that nation by sending the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.

That was Moses' incentive. It's why he could turn his back on the treasures of Egypt. He was investing in something of far greater value. He was looking ahead to an eternal reward, one that the Christ Himself would bring. And by identifying with the Hebrews, though they were slaves, Moses was in essence putting a deposit in the bank that would result in eternal dividends, for he was taking God's plan one step closer to fulfillment.

Camp on those words *of greater value*. Sure, Moses gave up the treasures of Egypt, but don't feel sorry for him. He didn't feel sorry about it. He regarded any disgrace he might have to suffer for the sake of Christ as *of greater value* than what he gave up.

Remember, the first readers of this letter were facing a similar decision. It must have encouraged them greatly to know that before them was the opportunity to do what their great leader Moses had done, to suffer with Christ, to give up everything this world has to offer, if necessary, but to gain Christ!

Let me personalize this...

1. *We ought not view suffering for Christ as merely our duty.* Yes, it's our duty to do whatever

our Savior asks of us, but it's more than duty. Let's learn from Moses.

2. *We ought to view suffering for Christ as the way to experience maximum joy.* Do you want to get maximum reward out of this life? Then get to know and live wholeheartedly for Christ, no matter what the cost. That was Paul's perspective...

Romans 8:18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Philippians 1:21 "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

2 Corinthians 4:17 "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

III. Because he saw what others could not see, Moses chose to leave Egypt (27).

Verse 27 "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible."

Moses actually left Egypt twice and there's some debate concerning which event the writer has in mind here. He left at the age of forty to flee to the back side of the desert in Midian (Exod. 2:11ff). Later at the age of eighty he left Egypt to lead the Hebrews to the promised land (Exod. 12:31ff.). The first departure seems to be the one the writer of Hebrews has in mind, since he makes a reference in verse 28 to Passover which occurred after he left Egypt the first time and before he left the second time. The problem, however, is that the account in Exodus says that Moses left for Midian out of fear, whereas Hebrews says it was by faith, *not fearing the king's anger*.

Is there a contradiction? No. Think about what happened when Moses was forty. He left the palace and tried to free the Hebrew slaves. He was convinced that God wanted to use him to deliver His people from bondage. It's why he slew the Egyptian master for abusing the Hebrew slave. But the way the circumstances unfolded made it clear to him that the timing wasn't right. Yes, God had raised him up to rescue His people, but not yet. That would come later, and for now he needed to wait.

As Leon Morris explains, "While his fear was real, his flight appears to have been because he did not think it was God's time for action."^[11]

Philip Hughes elaborates, "It was not personal fear of Pharaoh but the awareness of his destiny as the deliverer of the covenant people that caused him to take flight. Had he remained, at that juncture, this destiny would have been thwarted, humanly speaking, by his execution; and so, impelled by faith in the divine purpose for his life, Moses took refuge in Midian."^[12]

Did not Christ do the same? On more than one occasion He retreated from those who wanted to kill him (John 7:30; 8:20, 59; 10:31-39), but it certainly wasn't out of fear but out of the conviction that it wasn't God's time to stand. There's a time to fight and a time to flee, and both can be done by faith.

A. S. Peake put it this way, saying that Moses "had the insight to see that God's hour had not yet struck, and therefore he resolutely turned his back on the course he had begun to tread...For it was harder to live for his people than it was to die for them."^[13]

Most of us struggle to wait. If we're convinced that God wants us to do something, we want to do it *now*. We have a hard time thinking that He might want us *not* to take action, not yet. Peake reminds us that the "courage to abandon work on which the whole heart is set, and to accept inaction cheerfully as the will of God, is of the rarest and highest kind, and can be created and sustained only by the clearest spiritual vision."^[14]

In other words, sometimes we move ahead by faith, and sometimes we must wait by faith, and in

either case the motivating factor is that we see what others cannot see.

Again, I'm impressed by how Moses faced his fears.

A. Moses didn't yield to the fear of man. He "did not fear the king's wrath." Rather...

B. Moses chose to please a God he could not see rather than a king he could see. That's what it takes for us, too, beloved. One more example...

IV. Because he saw what others could not see, Moses chose to get ready for coming judgment (28).

Verse 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."

Think how strange God's instructions sounded to Moses. "We're supposed to kill a lamb? And then cut it open and take some of its blood, and put it on the doorframe of our houses? Won't that ruin the paint job?" Why did Moses obey those instructions? Here's why...

A. Moses believed that God would do what He said He would do.

1. *God said He would judge the ungodly. And...*

2. *God said He would pass over those under the blood.*

As you know, God has said the same thing to us. His Word declares that He is going to judge the ungodly, yet in His mercy He will pass over those under the blood.

Do you believe that? Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29, 36). If you have trusted in Him, you can say, as Paul affirmed, He is our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). And as Peter put it, we have been redeemed, "with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:19)."

But if you've never trusted in Christ, if you're not under His blood, then you are still in your sins, and God will judge you, and you will perish. O sinner, come to Christ today! Repent of your sins and receive Him as your Savior and Lord.

But there's something else we must do, as Moses did.

B. Moses took action to help others believe God too. Our text says he kept the Passover, not just for himself, but *so that the destroyer would not touch the firstborn of Israel*. He was concerned about his people. He urged them to apply the blood to the doorposts of their houses, too.

And I urge you, my Christian friend. Warn your family members and neighbors and classmates and friends. The destroyer is coming. Plead with them to place themselves under the saving blood of Christ. So you've pled with them already? Plead yet again! They may not understand you but that's because people who live by faith often do things that others don't understand, and that's because they see things that others don't see.

Let's make it personal. Would you ask yourself the following... *Am I living like I really believe in a person I cannot see?* Am I? Am I taking steps to teach my kids about this person? Am I regularly saying no to the temporary pleasures of sin, and am I regularly investing my time, my talents, and my treasures for the sake of Christ?

on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Shirley Litteral, taken from her journal, August 1992, included in a prayer letter sent by her husband Bob, April 2009.

[2] Philip Hughes, p. 492.

[3] Raymond Brown, p. 215.

[4] Warren Wiersbe, p. 319.

[5] Reference cited by Leon Morris, p. 125.

[6] See Leon Morris for his helpful explanation, p. 125.

[7] John Calvin, p. 177.

[8] Robert Gromacki, p. 191.

[9] C. S. Lewis explains, "The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire." quote taken from John Piper, *In Our Joy*, p. 32.

[10] Jonathan Edwards, quote taken from John Piper, *In Our Joy*, pp. 32-3.

[11] Leon Morris, p. 127.

[12] Philip Hughes, p. 499.

[13] A. S. Peake, quote taken from Raymond Brown, p. 217.

[14] *Ibid*, pp. 217-8.