

Moses—choosing to suffer

A sermon on Hebrews 11:23–28.

Moses prefigures the suffering of Jesus Christ in a number of ways. Moses suffered as the appointed leader of Israel. Christ suffered as the Saviour of sinners. We learn from Hebrews 11:25 that he chose ‘rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season’. In what way did Moses suffer, and what does this teach us about Christ’s suffering?

Moses chose to suffer

This much is declared in v. 25 of our text: ‘choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God’ etc. This is in contrast with the life he had, the life he could have continued to have, being known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. In that privileged role he might have enjoyed all the riches and pleasures proper to the king’s grandson—as well as those perhaps available to people who can buy their pleasures. But Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God. Why did he do so?

Because he was moved by faith. All his actions, and his whole life, was lived in regard for one greater than he. Moses looked outside and beyond himself, to God his Father, in whom he trusted. In Ex 3:6 the Lord calls himself ‘the God of thy father’, showing that Moses had faithful parents. Having been taught the ways of the Lord by them (his mother was also his nurse, Ex 2:7–9), he trusted in the Lord. When he killed the Egyptian slave-driver, he did so as Israel’s deliverer, Acts 7:25, believing that the Lord would indeed deliver his people, as he had promised, and that he, Moses, was that appointed deliverer. Had he not been moved by faith, it would have been pride or hatred that moved him: and we have no reason to consider that this was the case.

There was faith among the Israelites. Ex 2:17 records the midwives’ fear of God. In this fear they were prepared to defy Pharaoh: it was not that they were more afraid of God than of Pharaoh, but they had regard to God and his will more than to Pharaoh and his. What was true of these godly midwives was true of Moses’s parents, and of Moses himself. What a blessing it is to grow up in a godly home, among godly people.

He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. The pleasures and privileges of this life did not attract him. He would not be taken as being what he was not: he was a Hebrew. Moses had a real chance to do what too many Christians desire—to be both in the world and in Christ. Moses was a Hebrew, and no amount of putting on eye liner and twisting his beard into a queue would alter that. But he could have chosen both, and thus retained all the benefits of worldly privilege while remembering that he was an Israelite, and retaining the hope of the covenant. But he would not. Moses made a clear decision, and acted on it. He rejected the outward appearance of an Egyptian and instead chose the true nature of an Israelite. And in so doing, he suffered.

He chose suffering with God’s people over the pleasures of sin. As Pharaoh’s grandson he was exempt from bondage, and could have remained untouched: but he stood with his people. Even though he was an Israelite, he was not required to work, to make bricks (with or without straw being supplied), and to endure the whip and tongue of the slave-drivers. To choose suffering over the pleasures of sin is the sign of one who has reconciled the cost of Christian service. Jesus

said, 'For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?' (Lk 14:28). There is a cost associated with serving Jesus Christ, a cost many are unprepared to pay. Moses reckoned up the cost, and considered it worth paying. Our flesh may delight in the pleasures of sin, but, as with hasty marriages, there will be leisure enough in which to repent of the choice—only such repentance will be without hope of forgiveness in the fires of hell.

He esteemed the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Why did the people suffer? Because God had ordained it, Gen 15:13f. Better to obey and suffer. It may be asked, how could Moses know anything of the reproaches of Christ? Surely Paul (the writer to the Hebrews) is making a bold assumption? No: Paul knows full well that the saints of the Old Testament believed the promise concerning the seed of the woman. They knew that Israel's hope was focused on the coming of this child. They understood that Abraham was called to be the father of the nation in whom the child would come, and that the covenant was intended to provide the homeland and nation. They knew that the child would come through the house of Judah, and through the line of David. They came to know much of what he would do. They may not have known his name, but they knew his office, and that he would be anointed, which is the meaning of 'Christ'. Therefore Moses did indeed esteem the reproaches of the Anointed One greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

Of course, we know that the moveable treasures of Egypt would be carried away by the Israelites when they left. In choosing to suffer the reproaches of Christ, Moses and the people were not impoverished. Rather, faith in the Lord and his Christ led to a reward far greater than could have been imagined.

But again it may be asked, why should Moses choose the *reproaches* of Christ? How did faith in the covenant equal reproaches? Because God had said so, Gen 15:13: 'Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years'. Remember that Abraham went down into Egypt to avoid famine in Canaan, Gen 12:10ff. Isaac went to the Philistines for the same reason, Gen 26:1ff. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy corn, and, in the providence of God, brought his family there for refuge. And yet Egypt was not the promised land. Yes, it had plenty of food, and was well watered, but God had not covenanted to give it to Abraham's seed. And one way in which Moses could demonstrate his faith in God and his word was by choosing suffering with the Israelites rather than enjoying the treasures and riches of Egypt.

And we can add one more thing. In Gen 15:14 we are told that the Lord would judge that nation that afflicted his people Israel. Moses knew that the present suffering of Israel was temporary, but that a far worse kind of suffering awaited the oppressor. So for us. We are fighting a constant battle against the world and its pleasures. It seems at times that the denial of carnal pleasures is a price too high to pay. But we know that the world is reserved for judgment, 2 Peter 3:7. The treasures of Egypt and the treasures of this world will fade, indeed, melt, away. Why set any store by them?

By faith he forsook Egypt, not from fear but for God's sake. He did the work of a saviour, Acts 7:25, and went out—not to save his life but to obtain the blessing of the Lord. In this, Moses prefigures the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. To his family, both natural and adopted, Moses was dead. Moses did not depart from Egypt out of fear of retribution, but that he might return and complete the work of deliverance to which he knew he was called. After all, why else had the Lord God ordained the order of his life in this way? Why else cause him to be spared death at the hands of the Egyptians in his infancy, have him adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, raised by his own mother, and educated in all the wisdom of Egypt? Moses understood from all this that the Lord had a special purpose for him. Moses was attentive to this, and looked to the invisible God more than to the visible, physical and powerful Pharaoh. This is faith in action.

Jesus Christ chose to suffer

The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world was that he might save us from our sins, 1 Tim 1:15. This saving work was always going to be by suffering, and without suffering there could be no salvation, for without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, Heb 9:22. There can be no shedding of blood without suffering, and so the necessity of Christ's suffering is evident. Having considered Moses as a type of Christ in the matter of suffering, we now consider the Anti-type, Jesus Christ himself. Concerning his suffering, we note—

He was obedient to the will of the Father. His whole life on earth, was lived in perfect obedience to his Father's will. He delighted to obey, and was strengthened by it, John 4:34, as if it were the very food by which he was nourished. We may readily understand this of the miracles, the teaching, and all those evidences of his great power and majesty such as the Transfiguration, but what of his sufferings? Yes, even in these was he obedient to his Father's will. See Matt 26:39 etc. In Psalm 40:8 we read, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is written within my heart.' These words of David are applied to our Saviour, Heb 10:7 & 9. There, it is evident that more is being said than simply that Jesus Christ obeyed his Father. Rather, 'to do' means 'to enact' (cf. Heb 10:9, 'he taketh away the first, that he may establish the second'). Christ came to bring in the new covenant, to end the old sacrificial system by being himself the one, final and complete sacrifice for sin. And in this he was fully and submissively obedient to the Father. None of this was done in the will of the man Christ Jesus, but in the obedience of a Son. Our whole salvation depends on Christ's obedience, and the declaration of Scripture is that he was fully obedient.

Such obedience arises either from fear or from faith. To obey from fear is to only obey in part. A person may give outward obedience, and do all that is demanded of him, without engaging his heart or will in the matter. Such obedience may satisfy a tyrant on earth, but will not pass the judgment of the all-seeing, all-knowing God of heaven and earth.

True obedience arises from faith. A child obeys its father or mother in the knowledge that they both have lawful authority to command, and that they have the best interests of the child at heart. Obedience is wise. So for the child of God. We obey our heavenly Father, in ALL that he commands, because he has lawful authority as our Maker, and because he acts in love towards us as our Father. And we obey because we love him, and because we are taught by his Spirit to desire what he commands. Obedience is a mark of grace. O for more grace!

He was content to be identified with his suffering people. Jesus Christ took upon himself the sufferings of his people. What nation on earth has been more despised than Israel? What people have been more persecuted and reviled than they? Such hatred and revulsion were not unknown to the Lord before he called Abraham, and made him the father of that nation. Rather, our heavenly Father knew beforehand, and ordained, that his people should suffer—and that the Messiah should be from that nation. Even among his own people he was hated. The Pharisees, scribes and doctors of the law grew to hate him. They accused him of being a sinner, Matt 11:19, etc. Note Matt 9:10, Mk 12:37: Jesus kept company with sinners, and the common people heard him gladly. Why? Because he dealt fairly with them. He taught them what they needed to hear, and did so graciously. No doubt they had been told by the Pharisees and others that they were wicked sinners many times, but remained unmoved because they saw the hypocrisy of their accusers. Jesus Christ, however, spoke plainly and reasonably to them, and they saw the love he bore towards them. And for this, he suffered at the hands of the self-righteous.

But more, he suffered with his people who were under the judgment of God. All Israel was under judgment for their sins. Jesus Christ, being circumcised the eighth day, and being made under the law, came also under the condemnation of the law. He did so, not for any sin he had committed, for he committed none, but as the representative and federal head of his people. He chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, in order that he might be their Saviour.

He chose obedience to his Father over all earthly rewards. So John 6:15. Satan offered him the kingdoms of the world, but he would not receive them from the enemy of God and man. Men sought to make him king, but he would take no crown but from the hand of his Father at his ascension. Men bowed the knee before him at his trial, though only in mockery. The day is coming, and may even be at hand, in which every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ refused all flattering words, Mk 12:14. It is a human weakness that we are drawn to agree with those who speak well of us, since we wish to retain the affirmation of our good name and character implied in their well speaking. But to do so is dangerous. Such flattery tends to lead us to deny Christ. Let us follow Christ's example, and remain unmoved by such words, but rather be on guard against all that would deceive and lead us astray.

Christ exposed sin everywhere, Lk 7:40ff. In the house of Simon the Pharisee, v. 36, Christ received hospitality from one who was of standing in the community. But when the time came, our Lord was ready to draw attention to the sin he observed in his host. He was not concerned about a repeat invitation but about making the truth known. Earthly rewards held no appeal to our Lord Jesus Christ.

His faithfulness brought him to the grave, and to all that followed. The Apostle Paul, writing in Phil 2:5–11, shows us what Christ, and we, gained by the Saviour's death. His sufferings brought him to the cross, by way of the trials, the scourging, beating, spitting and mocking. He endured the betrayal of Judas, and the denial of Peter and the other disciples. He saw the deep and dreadful anguish of his mother, and yet none of this turned him from his path. He was fully prepared to die, to give up the ghost, and to submit to the awful reality of the curse. He went willingly to the cross, not fearing death, but as seeing him who, to us is invisible, but to him was nearer than life itself. When he cried, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit' (Lk 23:46), he was speaking to one he knew to be with him. The period of desertion was over, and the Father's presence was at hand. Christ suffered and died because he would obey the Father's will.

Summary

Our Lord Jesus Christ was and is in the bosom of the Father, John 1:8. He came from his Father's presence to redeem lost sinners. Paul describes this best, Phil. 2:5–11. He came to be the Saviour of his people, knowing that his people would reject him, Isa 53:3. He took upon himself the form of a servant, and became like us in all things, sin only excepted. The Good Shepherd came to seek lost sheep. Like Moses, he was tested in the wilderness—Moses at the burning bush, Christ by the devil after his fast. Moses must go with the sheep, and Christ had not where to lay his head, Lk 9:58.

For the great and final saving act, his propitiatory sacrifice on the cross, Jesus Christ must leave his people. He died and was buried. But the third day he rose again from the dead, and appeared unto his own, confirming to them the reality of God's salvation.

All of this was ordained of God, both for Moses and for Christ. Obedience to the will of the Father brought about the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage into the promised land. Note that Moses instituted and kept the Passover in faith, knowing that the destroying angel would not touch God's faithful people. Jesus Christ was content to be offered as our Paschal Lamb in order that the destroying angel should not touch his precious ones, the lambs for whom he laid down his life.

Let us, at this Eastertide, contemplate the sufferings of our Saviour, and meditate on the truth we are taught thereby. Let us see in them the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and know that there was no other way sinners could be saved. Let us then consider how sinful it is if we continue in sin. Let us look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. AMEN.